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Canada

"I CAN MANAGE MY OWN BUSINESS AFFAIRS"
FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN HALIFAX
AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of Arts
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Atlantic Canada Studies

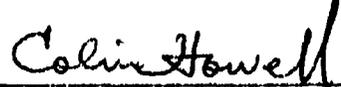
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ABSTRACT

"I CAN MANAGE MY OWN BUSINESS AFFAIRS" FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN HALIFAX AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

SHARON MYERS

Marking the period of time between childhood and marriage, a significant proportion of young women engaged themselves in factory work and at-home work for local industries as the twentieth century turned in Halifax. They clustered in certain industries, but their concentrated groupings did not signify unity and solidarity. The structure of the workplaces and the edicts of late Victorian society combined to discourage women from attempting to make themselves a greater unity. There is not a history of radical activism.

The female industrial workers of Halifax were a fundamentally isolated and fragmented lot, subject to high turnover rates, and pervasive loyalty to and dependence upon the family wage economy. The radical agency of Halifax's industrial women was undercut by a multitude of forces which reaffirmed for these young women their roles as potential wives and mothers. The sheer economic grind of low wages meant independent living was not an option for women.

While structural forces influenced the way women shaped their lives, so too did cultural forces. Clearly the women reaffirmed for one another their role in the domestic sphere.

Further, the edicts of late Victorian society confirmed, indeed prescribed, women's domestic role. Caught in the spirit of Victorian conservatism, social reformers advocated the maintenance of women's influence and participation within the domestic sphere. The very culture of Victorian society set young industrial women on a path to domesticity upon marriage. As a result of these factors, women who were engaged in industry saw themselves merely as temporary workers. To amass and struggle for change was, perhaps, to offer more primacy to the wage work world than most women, and society at large, afforded it in their lives over the long term. Denied a unified agent of change, women resorted to individual assertions of autonomy and personal expressions of struggle. The potential for radical change which accompanied women's increasing participation in the public sphere was, in the end, not realized.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HCW - Halifax Council of Women

HDFCW - Halifax-Dartmouth Local Council of Women

HLCW - Halifax Local Council of Women

PANS - Public Archives of Nova Scotia

RCRCL - Royal Commission of the Relations of Capital and
Labour

SPC - Society for the Prevention of Cruelty

INTRODUCTION

"At every turn she is met with the severely solemn reminder, 'you must not do this, it is man's work,' or the tenderly sneering reminder, 'you are not able to do this, it is man's work,'" wrote Maria Anguin in 1895. She brought her pen to the defence of those Haligonian women she called 'superfluous,' who were unmarried and needed to support themselves independently. She staunchly defended women who worked outside the home from social critics who argued women's proper workplace was within the home, within their 'appropriate' sphere of influence. "So persistently," wrote Anguin, "is this class ignored by the advocate of 'women's proper sphere,' we are forced to the conclusion that female wage earners are not to be ranked as women."¹

Anguin was responding to a climate of broad-sweeping change when women were redefining their roles in a society which struggled both to accommodate and to control them. Victorian sensibilities divided the world neatly into two spheres, or areas of appropriate activity: the public world of men, wage work and power, and the private world of women, the family and nurture. But the advance of industrialization - which demanded large, inexpensive labour pools - and the increasing importance of the family wage economy provided some women with the opportunity to participate, if only minimally and temporarily, in the public

¹ Maria Anguin, The Case of the Superfluous Woman, Halifax, 1895, PANS MG 100 Vol. 298, No. 17a.

sphere. In so doing, these women challenged their societies' fundamental structuring. Among those women were the Maritimes' first generation of female industrial workers.

The history of Maritime women remains, to an remarkable extent, buried in an inarticulate past. The "state of the art" guide to studies on Canadian women² lists two sources relating to the history of women in Atlantic Canada: Ruth Pierson's "Women's History: The State of the Art in Atlantic Canada,"³ and Alison Prentice's "Writing Women Into History: the History of Women's Work in Canada,"⁴ which is only partly related to Atlantic Canada. Local history studies of women in the Maritime provinces are somewhat more numerous. Nova Scotia claimed six articles [three biographies, one examination of Loyalist immigrant women, one article on women in Cape Breton and another article on Acadians]; New Brunswick's pioneer women received treatment, but the women of PEI were denied any understanding of their historical past. Yet things are not quite so bleak as Mazur and Pepper might lead one to believe. In 1983, Margaret Conrad published "The Re-birth of Canada's Past: A Decade of

2 Carol Mazur and Sheila Pepper, Women in Canada: A Bibliography, 1965 to 1982 [Toronto, 1984].

3 Ruth Pierson, "Women's History: The State of the Art in Atlantic Canada," Acadiensis, 7 [Autumn, 1977], pp. 121 - 131.

4 Alison Prentice, "Writing Women Into History: the History of Women's Work in Canada," Atlantis, 3 [Spring, 1978], pp. 72 - 84.

Women's History,"⁵ which surveys the historiography of Canadian women, and "Recording Angels: The Private Chronicles of Women From the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1750 - 1950,"⁶ in which she makes some tentative statements about the out-migration of women from the Maritimes. John Reid's essay on the education of women at Mount Allison helped us better understand the entrance of women into the higher education system.⁷ The next year, Christina Simmons published her study of the reformist women who operated the Jost Mission in Halifax.⁸ Ernie Forbes followed with a Maritime rejoinder to the work of Carol Bacchi on suffragism.⁹ Under the auspices of the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Elspeth Tulloch published her study of the political and legal status of New

5 Margaret Conrad, "The Re-birth of Canada's Past: A Decade of Women's History," Acadiensis, 12 [Spring, 1983], pp. 140 - 161.

6 Margaret Conrad, "Recording Angels: The Private Chronicles of Women From the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1750 - 1950," CRIAW Papers [Ottawa, 1983].

7 John Reid, "The Education of Women at Mount Allison, 1854 - 1914," Acadiensis, 12 [Spring, 1983], pp. 3 - 33.

8 Christina Simmons, "Helping the Poorer Sisters': The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905 - 1945," Acadiensis, 14 [Autumn, 1984], pp. 3 - 27.

9 Ernest Forbes, "The Ideas of Carol Bacchi and The Suffragists of Halifax: A Review Essay on Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877 - 1918," Atlantis, 10 [Spring, 1985], pp. 119 - 126.

Brunswick women from 1784 to 1984.¹⁰ Two volumes of women's writings, drawn mostly from diaries and letters of middle-class women, followed.¹¹ A clear trend to study the articulate, record writing women of the Maritime middle-class emerged.

The work of graduate students has made important contributions to the understanding of Maritime women's past. Lesley Beckett took up the study of women and higher education where Reid had left off.¹² Mary Clarke has examined the Saint John Enfranchisement Association and Rebecca Venoit has studied the Halifax Local Council of Women.¹³ Peter Lambley has traced the minimum wage campaign of inter-war women.¹⁴ Karen Sanders has examined the life

10 Elspeth Tulloch, We the Undersigned: An Historical Overview of New Brunswick Women's Political and Legal Status, 1784 - 1984 [Moncton, 1985].

11 Margaret Conrad, Toni Laidlaw, and Donna Smyth, No Place Like Home: Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women, 1771 - 1938 [Halifax, 1988]; and Elizabeth McGahan, Whispers of the Past: Selections from the Writings of New Brunswick Women [Fredericton, 1986].

12 Lesley Beckett, "The Effects of the Two World Wars on the Education of Women at Selected Maritime Universities: An Assessment, 1900 - 1970," BA Honours Thesis, Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, 1985.

13 Mary Clarke, "The Saint John Women's Enfranchisement Association, 1894 - 1919," MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, 1979;" and Rebecca Venoit, "The Halifax Local Council of Women," Honours Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1985.

14 Peter Lambley, "Towards a Living Wage: The Minimum Wage Campaign for Women in Nova Scotia, 1920 - 1935," Honours Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1977.

and works of reformer Margaret Marshall Saunders and Michael Smith has studied the broader spectrum of female reformers in Nova Scotia, with sensitivity to working class women. She has argued that the effort of Halifax's reformers to institute domestic science courses was, indirectly, an attempt to pull industrial women back into the private sphere. Smith argues that the "egalitarian impulses" of industrial women were hampered by the maternal feminist doctrine which admonished their activities.¹⁵

But by and large, the study of middle-class, articulate, easily accessible women is again evident in these works. Our historical understanding of Maritime women is, therefore, compromised in two ways: there is too little history written and what has been written, with some notable exceptions, presents the experiences of bourgeois women. While the history of the middle-class is valid and, indeed important, it does not offer an understanding of the full historical experience. As Gerda Lerner argues, "the resulting history of 'notable women' does not tell us much about those activities in which most women engaged, nor does it tell us about the significance of women's activities to society as a whole. The history of notable women is the history of

¹⁵ Karen Sanders, "Margaret Marshall Saunders: Children's Literature as an Expression of Early Twentieth Century Social Reform," MA Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1978; and Michael Smith, "Female Reformers in Victorian Nova Scotia," MA Thesis, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1986, pp. 37, 47, 56 - 57.

exceptional, even deviant, women and does not describe the experience and history of the mass of women. This insight is a refinement of an awareness of class differences in history: women of different classes have different historical experiences."¹⁶ The women who went to work in the factories of Halifax and other Maritime industrial centres lived a different historical experience than did many of the women that have thus far been written into our Maritime historiography. Except for Michael Smith's few statements little is known of Halifax's industrial women in the pre-war era.

To understand the experiences of these women necessitates a framework sensitive not only to issues of class, but to the experiences particular to gender. Ellen DuBois has isolated several categories of analysis for those who perceive the history of women as a history of oppression, among them the Marxist [structuralist] school and the new gender relations school.¹⁷ The structuralist-Marxist

¹⁶ Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definition and Challenges," Feminist Studies, 3 (Fall, 1975), p. 5. Lerner further argues that to study "movements" and the contributions women have made to them adopts a male-defined notion of society and fits women into it. The "movement," Lerner suggests, becomes the foreground. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues "...adding women to the received account - especially in the form of a few more neglected worthies or a lot more descriptive social history - does not necessarily change anything substantive in our manner of writing history." Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Placing Women's History in History," New Left Review (May - June, 1982), p. 6.

¹⁷ Ellen Carol DuBois et. al., Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe (Chicago, 1985), pp. 92.

analysis that pits the capitalist against the proletariat, the economically powerful against the economically exploited becomes complicated around the issue of gender. Bettina Bradbury, rejecting arguments that the "examination of women who were wage earners or activists requires no major redefinition of what constitutes a worker, how we define work, or, more importantly, who makes up the working class," suggests women's historians must ask different questions of labour history.¹⁸ Carol DuBois wonders "can women simply be added to class analysis, or does the entire class analysis have to be reshaped to take into account the sexual division of labour?"¹⁹ Most Marxist-feminist historians agree that the separation of work and home existed only for men and that women wage earners found themselves exploited not only in the wage workforce but also in their in-home, unwaged workworld where they contributed to the reproduction of the labourforce.²⁰ The growing appreciation that the experience of women wage-earners warranted unique analysis has given birth to queries regarding the specific role gender played in history. "Our commitment to feminist history," wrote the London Feminist History collective,

18 Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working Class History," Labour/Le Travail, 19 [Spring, 1987], p. 24.

19 DuBois, Feminist Scholarship [1985], p. 153.

20 Joan Kelly, "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory," Judith Newton et. al., eds., Sex and Class in Women's History [London, 1983], p. 260; and London Feminist History Group, The Sexual Dynamics of History [London, 1983], p. 2.

challenges the exclusive concentration on class which has dominated much British social history. We are no longer willing to contort our theory and our facts into a rigid terminology which ensures that any discussion of women's status attributes our oppression to capitalism. It is time to add the missing dynamic in history - men's power, and women's resistance.

"Some of us," they added, "consider the pivotal social conflict to be that between women and men, whilst others view patriarchy as a force equal to, and intertwined with capitalism."²¹ Yet gender system analysis which simply sees women oppressed to serve the interests of men is, like the structuralist-Marxist argument, compromised by its deterministic attribution of a single cause of women's oppression [patriarchy] and by its failure to account for gender role difference. Neither, using this framework, are women empowered. Rather the focus becomes "woman as victim."²²

In what is arguably a cornerstone of historical feminist theory, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese suggests the key to understanding women's past lies in examining the intersection

²¹ London Feminist History Group, The Sexual Dynamics of History (1983), p. 3.

²² Carroll Smith-Rosenberg attacks frameworks which portray women as victims saying, "it fails to look for evidence of women's reaction, of the ways women manipulate men and events to create new fields of power or to assert female autonomy. It is part of a general historical vision that sees individual lives as moulded by impersonal economic and institutional forces. Women's historians, for the most part, reject a view of individuals in general and women in particular as puppets." Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York, 1985), p. 17.

of class and gender systems, that women bore "the double perspective of social and sexual oppression." While Genovese defends the integrity of class analysis in women's history, she advocates the inclusion of gender system analysis. Genovese calls for the integrated use of gender and class as a category of historical analysis, emphasizing the historical roots of gender role determination and subordination rather than biological origins. "To the extent that male dominance, like class dominance, has obtained throughout history," writes Genovese, "there is no women's history, no form of female power, apart from it," but she notes that forms of male dominance vary according to time and place. She argues that the advent of capitalism generalized gender differences, "naturalizing" an order of hierarchy and dependence, and that the development of modern institutions "extended gender difference as a fundamental part of social order." The sexual division of labour in the family and wage labourforce was not a functional outgrowth, Genovese concludes, but a product of class and gender struggle, a cultural phenomenon.²³

Genovese's framework is exciting for several reasons. If women's oppression was historically produced, a series of cultural occurrences, then theoretically that oppression can be overthrown. And in Genovese's appreciation of class and

²³ Fox-Genovese, "Placing Women's History in History" [1982].

gender "struggle" women are ascribed agency and power [however limited it was] which the structuralists and determinists fail to attribute to them. In keeping with the neo-marxists,²⁴ some historians who are interested in gender systems recognize the reality of women's subordination but also seek out the subtle ways in which women were able to assert control over their lives, to challenge those who would deny them autonomy. "We see history," writes Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "as an ongoing struggle between women and men actors for control of the script, a struggle that ultimately transforms the play, the players - even the theater itself."²⁵ The female industrial workers of Halifax engaged in the struggles that faced and challenged women throughout the industrializing world but the history of Halifax's industrial women is not a history of radical or formal labour activism. It is, nonetheless, a history of struggle where women acted upon their world which, in turn, acted upon them.

Various themes recur throughout this study, among them, the widespread isolation and fragmentation of the workforce. Although women were concentrated in specific industries, the industrial women of Halifax were, nonetheless, geographically divided and physically separated by shop, factory floor,

²⁴ See E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class [Markham, 1984]. For an example of neo-marxian treatment of women cotton workers see Thomas Dublin, Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860 [New York, 1979].

²⁵ Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct (1985), p. 17.

workroom, and occupational task. Their anonymity was acute. Neither did male co-workers nor Victorian reformers champion a spirit of unity and cooperation among the women. That sense of isolation helped to undermine the creation of collective class and gender identity.

The pervasive role of family in the lives of these women underlines each chapter. Women's out-of-home work was most often predicated upon the status of her family economy. If the family required their income, young women left school and entered the workforce, labouring until marriage which signaled their return to the private sphere. Once married, women entered the workforce only in times of severe family economic crisis. Bound by inadequate wages to economic dependency on a family unit, industrial women came to reaffirm the primacy of family in their lives. The conservative spirit of late Victorian social reformism, which advocated reverence for family life and women's role therein, reaffirmed again for women their place in the domestic sphere.

Their loyalty to family would profoundly effect women's sense of themselves as workers. As women continued to afford the family such a primary role in their lives, women identified their experience in the workforce as temporary. Fragmented and isolated, viewing their labour as temporary, the experience of these women was not conducive to the creation of an unified nor radical group identity. Their

lack of formal activism is, therefore, not surprising. But faced with the often times harsh reality of life under modern industrial capitalism, women resorted to individual assertions of power and personal struggles for dignity. Though their entrance into the public sphere offered women some potential to assert a new role definition for women in the workplace, family, and society, women maintained their identities as potential wives and mother in a private world of hearth and heart. In the end, this thesis suggests, women's participation in the industrial labourforce was an essentially conservative experience.

The challenge of piecing together the script of Halifax's female industrial workers has been great. Traditional sources, in particular the business records for firms at which great numbers of the cities women were employed are generally non-existent. Letters, diaries, and journals that would allow us to hear industrial women speak in their own voices are elusive. Oral history interviews are made difficult by the sheer lack of survivors. Even the verbatim testimony offered by industrial workers to the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour [1889] is disappointing. While various issues regarding women workers were addressed throughout the inquiry, the only female operatives to give testimony were those at Halifax's cotton factory. A 100% sample of manuscript census records for Halifax [1891] has proved a rich source of information about

the demography of Halifax's industrial women and has provided some interesting insights into the relationships of these women to the family-wage economy.

To write the history of Halifax's early industrial women is rather like constructing a large and complex puzzle, only to find some pieces have been lost along the way. But just as the picture on the box allows us to fill in the elusive pieces and envision the scene, so too do the experiences of women under modern industrial capitalism elsewhere supply us with a more comprehensive understanding of the Halifax experience. A rich and diverse scope of secondary material does exist, allowing one to draw on the experiences of female industrial workers throughout North America.

This thesis examines the inherently contradictory lives of working-class women in Halifax during a period of modern industrial capitalism, urban growth and social change. Amidst a current of Victorian social standards, women struggled to come to terms with a society in flux and fashion a role for themselves.

CHAPTER ONE:
WOMEN, WORK AND FAMILY

At the turn of the twentieth century, a Halifax policeman wanted someone to take his evening shift. A young officer complied, and later that night he perished while trying to rescue the inhabitants of a burning house. The tragedy would affect the members of his family all of their lives, including two year old Elizabeth. Her parents had hoped Elizabeth, her three sisters and brother would finish their schooling. But on her fourteenth birthday Elizabeth, like her older brother and sisters before her, left school. She was legally old enough to work and her family needed her income. It was, she says often and apologetically, "out of necessity" that she entered the wage-labourforce. Elizabeth went to Moir's chocolate factory on Argyle Street where two of her sisters already worked. Moir's became her wage-work home for most of her life.

Each morning Elizabeth and two older sisters left their home in southend Halifax and walked ten minutes to the Moirs factory. Once at work, Elizabeth put on her smock, and tied her hair back with a snoot. The air was thick with the smell of warm rich chocolate and Elizabeth saw many women come and go from the factory because the sweet smell made them ill. She sat at a long table she shared with 129 other women. All day long she hand dipped creams, fudges and nuts, brought to her by male hands, in the trough of warm chocolate which ran the length of the table. Elizabeth was careful. If the

mixture was too hot, the chocolates would turn white; if it was too cool, the chocolate would clump. She was fined 10 cents a pound if her product was imperfect and that could flatten her paycheck. She occasionally glanced up from her work and noticed her sister, also a dipper, who sat at a different end of the worktable. They did not speak: the women were forbidden to talk amongst themselves. The "boss" [more accurately an overseer], "... a bachelor man who hated women ...," constantly watched her work. He consistently pulled the blinds even though factory inspectors had once made him raise them but women who stood in his good graces were given the better work. On the other side of the room, women called fancy packers wrapped the finer quality chocolates and placed them in boxes.¹ Elizabeth's experience of industrial life was like that of many women who worked in Halifax industry at the turn of the century .

The spread of modern industry was slow to touch Halifax. Development was immature as late as the 1870s when mechanization had struck only some of the tobacco, furniture, baking and shoemaking shops.² Artisanal workshops co-existed

1 Oral History Interview conducted by Sharon Myers, Miss Elizabeth M., Dipper, Moirs Chocolate Factory, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Conducted at her home. The participant has requested that her name not be published in any form. Though she would not provide the date of her birth, she is estimated to have been born around 1898, and to have entered Moirs' around 1912.

2 Halifax City Directory, 1871-1872 [Halifax, 1872], p. 36

with small factories, leaving Halifax with one hand holding the pre-industrial age, the other grasping for the future.³ But the capitalists persevered. Stimulated by the protective tariffs of the National Policy, employment and production in Maritime manufacturing doubled between 1870 and 1890.⁴ Despite slow industrial development, government investigators were prepared to announce by 1885 that there had been "a marked advance in industrial pursuits and in material progress generally." Even "a vast increase in the number and variety of machines and labor-saving appliances in factories and workshops" was apparent.⁵

3 Ian McKay, "The Working Class of Metropolitan Halifax," BA Honours Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1975, p. 24; see also Henry Veltmyer and John Chamard, "The Structure of Manufacturing in Halifax" [Gorsebrook Inst., Halifax, 1984]; and for the existence of similar circumstances in New England see, Jonathan Prude, The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810 - 1860 [Cambridge, 1983], p. 261.

4 S. A. Saunders, The Economic History of the Maritime Provinces [Fredericton, 1984], p. 83. On the economic growth of the Maritimes in this period see among others: T. W. Acheson, "The Maritimes and Empire Canada," David Bercuson, ed., Canada and the Burden of Unity [Toronto, 1980], pp. 87 - 115; "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880 - 1910," Phillip Buckner, ed., Acadiensis: Atlantic Canada After Confederation [Fredericton, 1985], pp. 176 - 201; David Alexander, "Economic Growth in the Atlantic Region, 1880 - 1940," Phillip Buckner, ed., Acadiensis: Atlantic Canada After Confederation [Fredericton, 1985], pp. 146 - 175; L. D. McCann, "Staples and the New Industrialism in the Growth of Post-Confederation Halifax," Acadiensis, 8 [Spring, 1979], pp. 47 - 79; "The Mercantile - Industrial Transition in the Metal Towns of Pictou County, 1857 - 1931," Acadiensis, 10 [Spring, 1981], pp. 29 - 64; and "Metropolitanism and Branch Business in the Maritimes, 1881 - 1931," Acadiensis, 13 [Autumn, 1983], pp. 112 - 125.

5 Canada, Sessional Papers [1885], no. 37.

Factories rose in north-end fields cut by the Intercolonial Railway and market and military roads. At the foot of Young Street, nestled between the harbour shore and Intercolonial tracks grew the massive, nine-storey Halifax Sugar Refinery. Up the steep Young Street hill and onto its level plane, pocketed at the intersection of Young, Kempt Road, and Robie Street rose the Nova Scotia Cotton Company which eventually employed the greatest number of the city's women under a single roof. A paint factory, car works, stove and furnace foundry, and graving dock added to the burgeoning industrial atmosphere of the Richmond suburb.⁶ Southeastward towards Halifax's more traditional business district, women worked at Clayton and Sons Clothiers, Doull and Miller (clothiers), the Nova Scotia and Mayflower Tobacco companies, at Moirs' confection factory and in other firms which hired small numbers of the city's daughters. The 2558 people employed in industry in 1871 swelled to 4021 in 1891. By 1911, 378 manufactories in Halifax employed over 5500 people.⁷

In 1891, 13.2 percent of Nova Scotian women were

⁶ See Paul Erickson, Halifax's North End: An Anthropologist Looks at the City (Montsport, 1986), especially pp. 47 - 49.

⁷ Canada, Census, 1911, Vol. III, Tab. IX, pp. 230 - 231. The census shows the number of manufacturing establishments in Halifax as 351 [1881], 348 [1891] and 104 [1901]. Canada, Census, 1901, Vol. III, Tab. XX, p. 327. However, the Census, 1891, Vol. IV, Tab. VI, p. 262 records 347 establishments for 1881.

TABLE ONE:
MANUFACTURING GROWTH AND FEMALE WAGEFORCE PARTICIPATION

HALIFAX MANUFACTORIES AND EMPLOYEES

DATE	NO. OF ESTABLISHMENTS	EMPLOYEES
1881	351	3013
1891	348	4021
1901	104	3203
1911	378	5716

HALIFAX MANUFACTORIES AND FEMALE EMPLOYEES

DATE	NO. OF ESTABLISHMENTS EMPLOYING WOMEN	FEMALE EMPLOYEES
1871	92	525
1881	193	748
1891	189	1,249

FEMALE WAGEFORCE PARTICIPATION, NOVA SCOTIA

GENDER PROPORTION OF WORKFORCE, NOVA SCOTIA

DATE	FEMALE	MALE
1891	14.4	85.6
1901	11.8	88.2
1911	14.1	85.9

PERCENTAGE OF PERSONS OVER AGE 10 EMPLOYED, NOVA SCOTIA

DATE	FEMALE	MALE
1891	13.2	78.8
1901	10.6	76.2
1911	13.2	77.1

Sources: Canada, Census of Canada, 1901, Vol. III, Tab. XX, p. 327; 1911, Vol. III, Tab. IX, pp. 230-31, Vol. VI, Tab. 6, p. XVI, Tab. 7, p. XVII. Lever, "Women and Industry: Halifax, 1871 - 1891" [1978].

employed in wage work, fully 2 points above the national average. Only 10.6 percent were employed in 1901, reflecting a turn of the century decline in the number of industrial establishments, but in 1911, 13.17 percent of the province's women worked for wages [a percentage point below the national average]. In the same year, women comprised 14.06 percent of the Nova Scotian workforce.⁸ In 1871, 525 female industrial workers were scattered throughout 92 establishments in Halifax, but by 1891, 194 city factories employed 1257 women.

Perhaps the most suggestive indicator of women's use in industries is reflected in their proportional representation within the factories. In 1891, women formed nearly 50 percent of the workforce in factories which employed females.⁹ Some factories were especially reliant upon women workers. At Clayton and Sons, women outnumbered men by an 8 to 1 ratio. The Mayflower Tobacco Company employed 21 men and 50 women. Thus, the direct involvement of women in the wage-labour workforce was not rare, and the participation rate is even more significant in the light of another factor affecting the experience of women at this time. As Margaret Conrad has noted, "between 1881 and 1921 over 165 000 Maritime-born women left the region." Even by 1880, 4374

⁸ Canada, Census of Canada, 1901, Vol. III, Tab. XX, p. 327; and 1911, Vol. VI, Tabs. VI and VII, p. xvi and xvii.

⁹ Canada, Census, 1891, Vol. III, Tab. I; and Catherine Lever, "Women and Industry: Halifax, 1871 - 1891," Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1978.

Maritime women were employed in Boston alone.¹⁰

Work was not a new phenomenon even for the first generation of industrial women.¹¹ The planting of gardens, the picking and processing of their yields, the construction and maintenance of clothing and household tools, the management of the household, and the reproduction of the labourforce were economic tasks women had always performed. But the tradition of out-of-home work, apart from the domestic service, belonged to men. In carpenter's shops, blacksmith's sheds, and manufactories, men shared the proto-industrial work experience. The creation of the modern, industrial factory confronted people with a new work experience, one which was especially foreign to women. Nonetheless, it was women who became the labour pool for the factories. Ian McKay notes that "...what really set [the factory] apart was the nature of the workforce it created. The women of the city were drawn into production for the first time, as were children, in order to provide the cheap labour necessary for industrial capitalism." McKay further notes that "those workers who worked in factories were the

10 Conrad, Recording Angels [1982], p. 14.

11 Heleith Saffioti notes "In the social strata employed directly in the production of goods and services women have never been estranged from work. At all times and in all places, women have had a hand in providing for their families and in the creation of social wealth. ... As long as the family existed as a unit of production, the economic role of women and children was fundamental to its existence." Heleith Saffioti, Women in Class Society (New York, 1978), p. 41.

central characters of the age of transition:
 industrialization was the cardinal fact of their working
 experience."¹²

The industrial women of Halifax, like industrial women everywhere, were concentrated in certain industries: cotton and woolen manufacturing, boot and shoe making, tobacco processing and, most especially, the garment trades.¹³ In the 1871 nominal census, 450 women were found in the garment trades, 74 in other industrial occupations.¹⁴ Sixty-five percent of the roughly 1257 women and girls who laboured in the Halifax manufacturing sector in 1891 worked in dressmaking, millinery, tailoring or clothiery.¹⁵ It was

12 Ian McKay, "The Working Class of Metropolitan Halifax [1975], pp. 107, and 167-168.

13 Canada, Census, 1891, Vol. III, Tab. I. See Bryan Palmer, Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour [Toronto, 1983], p. 116.

14 Lever, "Women and Industry" [1978]. Lever notes that the industrial schedule for 1871 records 258 women in the garment trades and 267 women in other industrial occupations. Despite the discrepancy, she notes, the total number of female industrial workers was virtually equal. Of the 74 "other" industrial women, 15 constructed boots and shoes, 14 were confectioners, 11 processed tobacco, 10 bound books, 5 were general factory hands, 3 were employed as furriers, 2 as chair bottomers, 2 worked as operators, and 1 woman manufactured brooms.

15 Canada, Census, 1891, Vol. III, Tab. I. On the inherent dangers of using census to study female labourers see: Richard Wall, "Work, Welfare and the Family: An Illustration of the Adaptive Family Economy," Lloyd Bonfield et al. eds., The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure [New York, 1986], p. 294. See also Edward Higgs, "Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth Century Census," where he states, "... it is necessary to treat the occupational information in the

within the garment trades, a traditional field of 'women's work,' that many women encountered industrial life for the first time. But the garment trades bridged the tradition of home-work and the new out-of-home work. Many women continued to do piece-work within their homes for the factory.¹⁶

On April 3, 1888, W. J. Clayton of the clothing factory Clayton and Sons of Halifax, testified before the Royal Commission on Labour and Capital. Although Clayton recorded 300 employees in his books, only about 100 actually worked in the factory. The others, he told the Commissioners, worked occasionally for his factory and often worked for other clothing factories in the city. It is reasonable to suspect that of the 200 or so not in the factory, a sizable proportion were kept constantly employed in at-home piecework. W. H. Gibson of the clothing firm Doull and Miller reported his company's use of home-workers and remarked that some of the outworkers used members of their family to assist in the work, part of a hidden economy of

manuscript census enumerators' book with caution, and that the historian's use of the published census reports should be even more circumspect." History Workshop, 23 [Spring, 1987], pp. 59 - 80.

16 See D. Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in Nineteenth-Century Montreal," Susan Mann Troffimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History [Toronto, 1977], p. 73; and Dublin, Women at Work [1979], p. 16

TABLE TWO:
DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, HALIFAX, 1891

<u>BY % OF FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS</u>		
INDUSTRY	INDUSTRIAL SCHEDULE	NOMINAL CENSUS
Bakeries	0.6	---
Baking Powder	0.2	0.3
Bookbinding	2.1	2.1
Boots and Shoes	5.1	2.0
Brush and Broom	0.4	0.4
Cabinet/Furniture Making	0.9	0.2
Chemical Establishments	0.2	0.6
Confectionery	3.3	0.4
Corset Factory	0.2	---
Cotton Mill	11.6	9.2
Dressmaking/Millinery	7.8	32.8
Dyeing and Scouring	0.1	0.4
Furriers and Hatters	1.1	0.2
Meat Curing	0.2	---
Musical Instruments	0.1	---
Paint and Varnish	0.1	0.1
Paper Bag and Boxes	0.5	0.5
Pickle Making	0.2	---
Printing/Publishing	0.8	0.5
Ropeworks	---	0.3
Soap and Candles	0.1	---
Tailors/Clothiers	57.5	48.9
Tobacco Working	2.7	0.8
Watchmakers/Jewellers	1.2	---
Woolen Mill	2.8	---
Unknown	---	0.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

Sources: Canada, Census of Canada, 1891, Vol. III, Tab. I, and nominal returns, Schedule 1, District 33.

Note: Several factors may account for the discrepancy between the two schedules. Primarily, women may have been overlooked while carrying out the tedious process of gathering industrial women from the nominal schedules. Secondly, given that the industrial and personal census' were taken at different times of the year, women may have changed or left their jobs in that interim. Thirdly, as census officials acknowledged in the introduction to the 1881 published census, 'it must be remembered that there cannot be any precise agreement between two statements, they having reference to two states of facts, the one giving the number of hands employed at the several industries, it may be a week a month or a year; the other giving that occupation to which the person devotes the principal part of his time... ."

female workers which the census fails to identify.¹⁷

Another 14.4 percent of female industrial workers were employed in the cotton and woolen mills in 1891, institutions synonymous with industrialization. Large numbers of women and children concentrated there, tied to the discipline of machinery, overseers, and time-clocks.¹⁸ Even the earliest - albeit unsuccessful - prospectus for the founding of a cotton factory in Halifax noted the "want of appropriate employment for females in the Province is being felt and complained of..." and suggested the mill could provide employment for them.¹⁹ Indeed, a rush of applications for employment flooded the factory prior to its opening. "There seems to be an impression among young girls in Halifax," reported the Acadian Recorder, "that the Cotton Factory will employ an unlimited number of them... . The factory has already received applications from several times as many such as they want. The names are put down, but will

17 Canada, Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor in Canada: Evidence - Nova Scotia (Ottawa, 1889), pp. 1 and 7. Hereafter RCRCL [1889].

18 Bettina Bradbury, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montreal in the 1870s," Historical Papers [1979], p. 174; Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, Women, Work and Family (Toronto, 1978), p.64; Daniel Walkowitz, Worker, City, Company Town (Chicago, 1978), pp. 32, 52, 62; and Anthony Wallace, Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution (New York, 1972), p. 61.

19 Office of the Nova Scotia Society for Encouraging Home Manufactures, Prospectus of the Halifax Cotton Manufacturing Co., Ltd. Halifax, 14 March, 1870, PANS Manuscript Collection.

not likely be reached perhaps for years."²⁰

As women concentrated in specific industries, so too did they share similar demographic groupings. In 1871 and 1891, over one-half of Halifax's industrial women were Roman Catholic and, in 1891, 23 percent belonged to the Church of England. But certain denominations clustered in specific industries. Eighty percent of the women who worked in the printing and publishing industry, for instance, were Catholic. The disproportionate concentration of Anglicans was obvious in the cotton industry [39.8%]. A transition in the ethnic makeup of the workforce is obvious, reflecting the changing profile of the provincial population. In 1871, a disproportionate 48.6 percent of female industrial workers were Irish. By 1891, over 83 percent of the women were Nova Scotian born but only 49 percent of their fathers and 61 percent of their mothers were native Nova Scotians.²¹

Following patterns of women's wage-employment in other areas, the majority of Halifax's industrial women were young. In 1871, for instance, 60 percent were under age 25 and of those, nearly 40 percent were under 20.²² The same pattern

²⁰ Acadian Recorder, 12 April, 1883.

²¹ Lever, "Women and Industry" [1978]; Census, 1891, Vol. I, Tabs. IV and V. In 1871, 39.4 percent of Halifax's population was Irish, which decreased to 2.9 percent by 1891. In 1891, 40.7 percent of the Halifax population was Catholic, 8.7 percent were Church of England.

²² Lever, "Women and Industry" [1978]. See also Wall, "Work, Welfare and the Family" [1986], p. 279.

FIGURE ONE:
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF ALL FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, HALIFAX, 1891

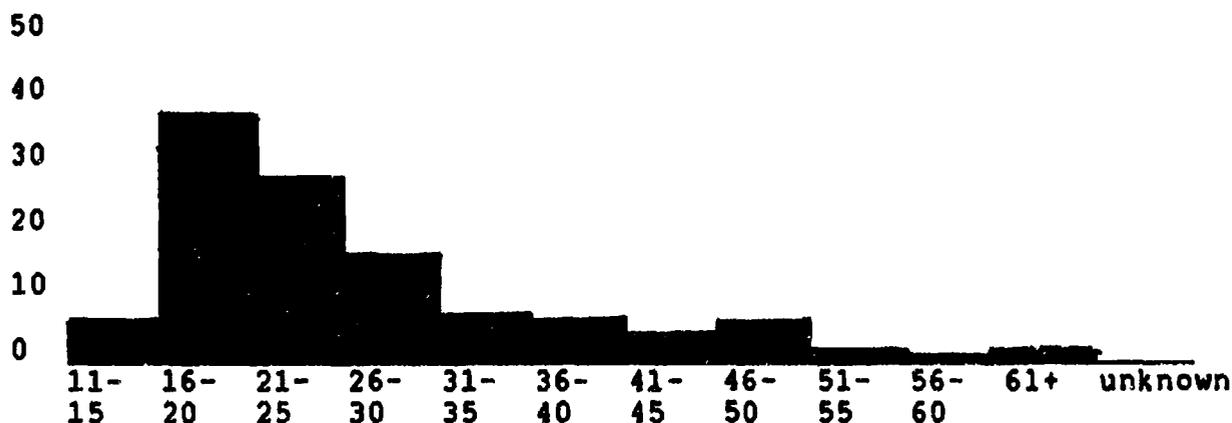


FIGURE TWO:
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF DRESSMAKERS, HALIFAX, 1891

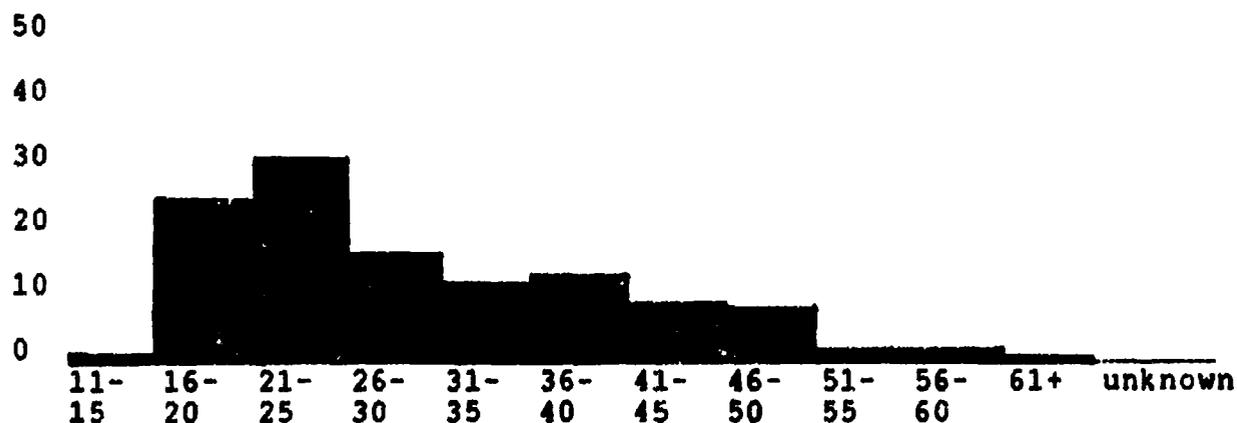
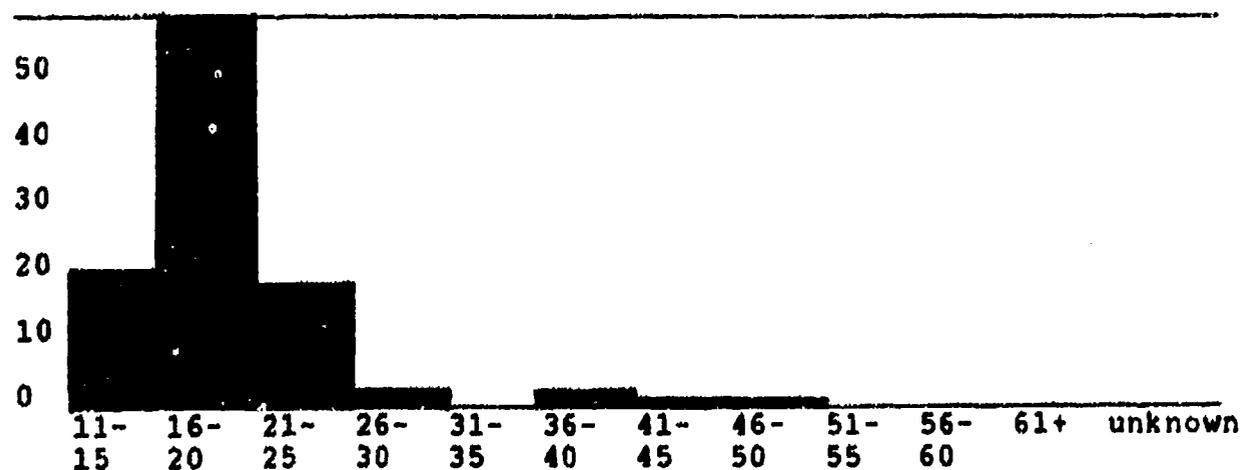


FIGURE THREE:
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE COTTON WORKERS, HALIFAX, 1891



Source: Nominal Census (1891).

holds for 1891 but the distribution of age groups in various industries is very interesting. In the tailoring and clothiery sector, 41.4 percent of the women were under 20, 68.4 percent were under 25. Among the dressmakers, only 23.3 percent were under 20, 51.2 percent under 25. While the participation of women over 25 appears most clearly amongst the dressmakers, the cotton industry, by contrast, showed an abundant concentration of young women. Nearly 78 percent of women in the cotton factory were aged 20 or younger. Fully 94 percent of cotton working women were under 25.

The vast majority of Halifax's factory women were unmarried. In 1871, 85.6 percent of the women were single. An additional 9.4 percent were widowed. In 1891, fully 93 percent were single women, among them, 8 percent who were widowed. Bryan Palmer has found that, on average, only 2.5 percent of Canada's female labourforce was married.²³ The concentration of young, unmarried women clearly reflects the importance of lifecycle stages in women's out-of-home work. The marriage of a young factory woman ostensibly signalled her exit from the workforce. John Sutherland, foreman at the Mayflower Tobacco factory, told the Royal Commission on the

²³ Palmer, Working-Class Experience [1983], p. 81. See also Terry Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working-Class in Montreal, 1897 - 1929 [Toronto, 1974], p. 33; Alice Klein and Wayne Roberts, "Besieged Innocence: The Problem and Problems of Working Women - Toronto, 1896 - 1914," Janice Acton et. al. eds., Women at Work [Toronto, 1974], p. 227; and Wayne Roberts, Honest Womenhood [Toronto, 1976], p. 10.

TABLE THREE:
LIFECYCLE STAGES OF FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKER'S FAMILIES

LIFECYCLE STAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT OF WORKERS
Wife under 45, no children	14	1.3
1 child, under 1	8	0.8
All children 10 and under	76	7.1
1/2 and more children, 15 and under	150	14.1
over 1/2 of children over 15	294	27.6
All children 15 and over	371	34.8
wife over 45, no children	4	0.4
Boarding House/Lodgers	149	14.0

Source: Nominal Census, Halifax [1891].

Note: The categories above, adapted from the work of Bettina Bradbury, refer to the developmental stage of the family ranging from the newly formed, childless family [wife under 45, no children], to the family whose children have left their family of origin, resulting in the "empty nest" stage [wife over 45, no children]. The middling stages are defined by the concentration of children in age groups. One-half and more children, 15 and under, for instance, means at least half of those persons in the family who were not parents or other adult relatives, were under 15 years old.

Relations of Capital and Labour that "girls" worked at his factory until they married.²⁴ Indeed the family role of the majority of female industrial workers and their concentration in the mature family stages of the lifecycle illustrates clearly the nature of the workforce: that for the vast majority of women involvement in the wage labourforce was a stage of transition between childhood and marriage.

The untimely death of Elizabeth's father profoundly influenced her entire life experience. Bryan Palmer calls the historical study of the family a "research priority" which will help to "...uncover a history buried in inarticulate experience."²⁵ "Efforts to mesh two important specialties, labour history and the history of the family, seem particularly worthwhile," suggests Elizabeth Pleck, "because in their concern for work and family these topics embrace two of the more fundamental areas of human activity and emotional investment."²⁶ Pleck and Nancy Cott argue that

24 RCRCL [1889], p. 73. Gee identifies the average female age of marriage in Nova Scotia at 26 in 1871 and 1891. Ellen Thomas Gee, "Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 19 [1982], p. 320.

25 Palmer, Working Class Experience [1983], p. 81. Eli Zaretsky defines "family" as "... any grouping of parents or other relatives with children, embodying a sexual division of labour and distinguishing itself as a unit by legal, economic, and sexual rights and taboos." Eli Zaretsky, Capitalism, The Family and Personal Life [New York, 1976], p. 25n.

26 Elizabeth Pleck, "Two Worlds in One: Work and Family," Journal of Social History, Vol. 10, No. 2 [Winter, 1976], p. 178. 19. For the same argument see Bradbury,

"women's history must refer to the history of the family, since women's activities have so largely been defined by household and family needs."²⁷

The growth of industrial capitalism altered the family, not in terms of its structure, but in the way it organized for work. In pre-capitalist societies, the family was the basic unit of economic production and consumption. The arrival of industrial capitalism removed many families from the property of production and created a clear distinction between the family [private] realm and the economic [public] realm. In the process the role of the family as an economic unit was obscured.²⁸ But Tamara Hareven notes that while families were no longer production units, they remained viable work units.²⁹ Urban, industrial families no longer needed to organize their members to manage the farm, yet they did need to organize their workers to garner enough money to support the family. Thus Halifax and other industrial towns were characterized by dual economies: the private family economy and the public capitalist economy. "The former,"

"Women's History and Working Class History" [1987] p. 25.

²⁷ Nancy Cott and Elizabeth Pleck, A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women (New York, 1979), p. 19.

²⁸ Zaretsky, Capitalism, The Family and Personal Life [1976], p. 61.

²⁹ Tamara Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between The Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community (Cambridge, 1982), p. 189

remarks Edward Higgs, "is 'manned' by women and the latter is dominated by men."³⁰

As much as a woman's participation in industry was part of her particular life stage, it was also a demand of the family wage economy. The Department of Labour estimated the weekly expenses for an average family of five to be \$13.77 in 1901 and \$18.31 in 1911. But in 1901 the average weekly wage for a male Canadian working in the manufacturing sector was \$7.78, and in 1911, \$10.55. Even the combined weekly wages of a male and female industrial worker were insufficient to meet the estimated weekly cost of living.³¹ The great tendency toward single family living - 63 percent in 1891 - suggests that the placement of family members in the workforce was perceived either as a preferable or a more effective method of ensuring a family wage than family extension or augmentation. The taking in of lodgers and extended family members provided some families with the means to secure income for the family. But that did not mean the two systems were mutually exclusive. In some cases, payments of board acquired through augmentation or extension would fail to support the family adequately and the family would employ both augmentation and participation of family members in the wageforce to support itself.

The occupations of household heads clearly suggest that

30 Higgs, "Women, Occupations and Work" [1987], p. 60.

31 Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty [1974], p. 32.

TABLE FOUR:
RELATION OF FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKER TO FAMILY HEAD, HALIFAX, 1891.

RELATIONSHIP	FREQUENCY	PERCENT OF WORKERS
Daughter	684	64.2
Lodger	141	13.2
Head	98	9.2
Sister	55	5.2
Wife	48	4.5
Neice	11	1.0
Sister in Law	11	1.0
Stepdaughter	10	0.9
Grand-daughter	3	0.3
Mother	2	0.2
Not Listed	2	0.2
Cousin	1	0.1

Source: Nominal Census [1891].

industrial working women in Halifax often laboured out of necessity. Less than 10 percent of their household heads were proprietors, officials, semi-professionals, clerks, managers or white collar workers. Yet 33 percent were skilled blue collar workers, 12 percent were semi-skilled service workers, and 15 percent were unskilled workers, concentrated in the lower paid occupational classes. Further, 17 percent were not employed.³² These circumstances would often dictate a young female family member's entrance into the wageforce until her marriage and move from her family of orientation, but it was only under the most severe economic conditions that a married woman with children would work.

A cotton worker told the 1889 Labour Commission that wives went to work only when their husbands were ill.³³ As the above table suggests, the greatest proportion of atypical female workers were female household heads, the majority of whom were widows and abandoned wives. The removal of the male wage-earner caused intense financial difficulty for a young family. Often the mother would return to her family of origin or affix lodgers and extended family members to the household to secure income. But in some cases, the mother would enter or return to the factory to support her children.

³² Nominal Census, Halifax [1891]. Note the occupational group of the additional 14 percent of lodgers was not sampled.

³³ RCRCL [1889], p. 72.

Even then the family bordered on utter destitution. After Annie McCullough's husband died in 1907 she went to work at the cotton factory and moved herself and young child to Henry Boyce's boardinghouse. In 1908, Annie died of cardiac syncope outside the house and, suggesting extended family was non-existent or too far away, her child was placed in a institution.³⁴

The majority of female household heads who were forced to provide for their families did not, it seems, necessarily leave their family for the factory each morning. A disproportionate 14.2 percent of dressmakers were heads of households and they well may have worked in the home producing ready-mades for the factory. The concentration of married women and widows in the dressmaking industry, not surprisingly, was disproportionately large.

The financial risk of the young woman who moved to the city to labour in its factories was especially strong. Those without relatives in the city often boarded with other families. Earning on average only \$3.50 a week in wages, she often paid \$3.00 a week or \$4.00 to \$6.00 each fortnight in boarding costs.³⁵ Some evidence suggests that young women who left the farm for the city brought with them relatively substantial savings, or depended upon their rural families for financial support for some time after their arrival in

34 Herald, 15 December, 1908, p. 4.

35 RCRCL [1889], pp. 5, 201, 203 and 208.

TABLE FIVE:
MARITAL STATUS OF FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, HALIFAX, 1891

<u>BY PERCENT OF CATEGORY</u>			
CATEGORY	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED
ALL INDUSTRIAL WOMEN	84.9	7.2	7.8
BOOT AND SHOE	85.7	14.3	0
COTTON	89.8	7.1	3.1
DRESSMAKING	79.8	10.8	9.4
TAILORING	86.8	4.7	8.6

Source: Nominal Census [1891].

the city. At the cotton factory, women trained for five or six weeks before they received wages. At Clayton's the women endured a three month, unwaged training period.³⁶

The women who worked in these factories were engaged in a series of complex social relationships. In the mornings they left their families which provided familial support while concurrently limiting their autonomy. The decisions of where and when to work, and of which family members were to work often went against what would have been the personal choices of the women. Women trod through Victorian society on their way to work. Their relationship to society was a contradictory one. While they served the interests of the capitalists they also contradicted the Victorian notions of women's proper place in the social order. Once in the factory, women were confronted with demanding time schedules, noisy machines, the watchful eyes of the overseer, and one another.³⁷

Many women shared working conditions similar to

³⁶ RCRCL [1889], pp. 2 and 202.

³⁷ On a similar point Alan Dawley writes: "The Social System of the industrial city was a study in contradiction: the regimentation of factory discipline against the chaos of the street; the rational calculation of individual businesses against the irrational character of the whole; the functional architecture of the factories against the ostentatious opulence of the owners' homes; bureaucratic forms of social control against the voluntary association of individuals." Alan Dawley, Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn [Cambridge, 1976], p. 97. For a portrait of "adaptation" to industrial work see Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time [1982], pp. 125 - 126.

FIGURE FOUR:
THE WORKROOM, CLAYTON AND SONS, HALIFAX, circa. 1900



Source: Item 24, Jean Holder Collection, PANS Acc. 1980-195.
Negative N-172. Inscribed Clayton and Sons Merchant Tailors and
Clothiers and Dealers in Bicycles.

Elizabeth's when they walked through the factory door. The sickening odor of chocolate at Moirs had its counterpart in the thick clouds of dust at the cotton factory. Employees of the Nova Scotia Cotton Company reported that in some rooms the air was thick with dust, that there was a lack of drinking water, and they were forbidden to open the windows. Dust was trapped inside the factory. The summer heat added to the warmth produced by the noisy spinning and weaving machines.³⁸ The danger of those machines was immediate and persistent. In the summer of 1893, young Ella Farrel's finger was, the Acadian Recorder reported, "crushed to jelly" and later amputated.³⁹ The high-speed mule spinners often caused fire. So often did this happen that operatives would stay at their stations, trusting that the fire would be put

³⁸ Morning Herald, 5 June, 1883, p. 2; RCRCL [1889], pp. 80, 203 - 204, and 204. The Corrective Collective writes of the sweating trades: "A woman could go blind after years of working in the poorly lit lofts. Gas irons used for pressing released lethal fumes. Sometimes the air was so foul the workers could not see each other across the room. Thus by the 1890s, one of the few traditional trades open to women had been turned into a degrading, literally killing occupation for women of Canada's cities." The Corrective Collective, Never Done: Three Centuries of Women's Work in Canada [Toronto, 1974], p. 87. On the pervasiveness of these working conditions in a Maritime Victorian factory see: Peter Delottinville, "Trouble Comes to the Hives of Industry: The Cotton Industry Comes to Milltown, New Brunswick, 1879 - 1892," Canadian Historical Association Papers [1980, p. 106; See also Susan Mann-Trofimenkoff, "One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices," Atlantis, 3 [Autumn, 1977], p. 73.

³⁹ Acadian Recorder, 12 August, 1893, p. 3.

out quickly.⁴⁰ At the same factory the women described the brutal kicking and beating of the young boys and, in the spinning room, the cuffing of young girls by an underboss.⁴¹ The industrial women of Halifax spent roughly 60 hours of each week in that atmosphere.⁴²

The contribution of women's wages most often was necessary to the economic survival of the family or her own subsistence and the dependability of a regular income was of paramount importance in planning the family budget. In her classic study of milltown life and its effects upon the family, Margaret Byington noted:

It is through the households themselves that the industrial situation impresses itself indelibly upon the life of the people. ... The mill affects the family even more intimately through the wage scale to which the standards of home making, housekeeping, and child rearing must conform.⁴³

But the certitude of wages was a precarious thing in the female industrial worker's world of fines, piecework and

40 See the report of a fire at the cotton factory in the Acadian Recorder, 7 April, 1898, p. 3. The women waited at their stations for fully 5 minutes before smoke forced them from the building.

41 RCRCL [1889], pp. 23, 75, 80, 129, 203, 204, and 205.

42 RCRCL [1889], pp. 21, 74; After 1893, women were protected by a maximum 60 hour work-week [outside the home] under the Industrial Establishments Act. Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty [1974], 26, 45. After 1911, children under 15 were forbidden to work except in the fruit and fish canning industries. Corrective Collective, Never Done [1974], p. 103.

43 Margaret Byington, Homestead: The Households of a Milltown [New York, 1910], p. 179.

layoffs.⁴⁴

The most important feature of the industrial factory was not the machinery nor the grouping of strangers in a common workplace but the attempt to organize, control and subjugate the workforce through regulations.⁴⁵ The fines that Elizabeth so dreaded at Moirs were pervasive in early industries and undermined the income stability of working women. Fines were instituted not simply to reimburse management for an unmarketable product, but to serve as an incentive for discipline, order and careful attention to work.⁴⁶ At the cotton factory, operatives were fined for misconduct, damage, talking amongst themselves, lateness, (which was anytime after 6:25), and poor work. The weaver was charged when, through no fault of her own, oil dropped from the loom on to a piece of cloth.⁴⁷ There were no direct fines at Taylor's Boots and Shoes but Taylor acknowledged that if the hand's work was in any way damaged, she was

44 See Trofimkoff, "One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices," [1976], p. 72.

45 See James Rinehart, The Tyranny of Work [Don Mills, 1975], p. 32.

46 On this point see among others, Prude, The Coming of Industrial Order [1983]. Prude argues "...the techniques used by early mill masters to enforce discipline - including punctuality - in their factories were deemed particularly repugnant. The system of room overseers, fines, blacklists, and occasional beatings called to mind all too readily the loathed regimen of late eighteenth century poorhouses." p. 37. See also Rinehart, The Tyranny of Work [1975], p. 32.

47 RCRCL [1889], pp. 22, 203, and 204.

forced to pay for the piece. At the Mayflower Tobacco Factory on Cornwallis Street, hands were not fined, but were fired if they breached the good graces of their boss.⁴⁸

A woman's wage could be reduced drastically if she was on piecework and was kept waiting for materials, which was quite usual. A reeler at the cotton factory told Royal Commissioners that her wages ranged from \$4.28 for a busy week to \$2.32 when she was made to wait for work. Management decided when women would be assigned to piecework and often changed the women's wage scale by putting them some days on piece and other days on wage work. As a result, few women counted on a steady, uniform wage.⁴⁹ Temporary and seasonal shutdowns further undermined women's income stability. The Mayflower Tobacco Company, for instance, averaged only nine months of operation a year. In the summer of 1890, the Nova Scotia Cotton Manufacturing Company worked a three day week and in the summer of 1901, the factory completely shut down for nine weeks.⁵⁰

The male employer's perception of female industrial workers is revealed in several ways, but the most conspicuous evidence of their attitude is found in the labour division of

48 RCRCL [1889], pp. 17, 20, 22, 74, 77, 80.

49 RCRCL [1889], pp. 204, also 201, 203 and 206.

50 RCRCL [1889], p. 20. Morning Chronicle, 4 July, 1890, p. 3; and Novascotian, 16 August, 1901, p. 7. On the regularity of cotton factory shutdown see: Delottinville, "Trouble Comes to the Hives of Industry" [1980], p. 107.

men and women and in the discrepancy of wage payments between the genders.⁵¹ The average weekly pay for a male employee at the cotton factory was \$7.50. In contrast, the average weekly pay for a female operative was \$3.90, while children earned \$1.25 for their work.⁵² Women weavers could make the same as a male weaver - around \$10.00 a week for six looms, but more often they worked four.⁵³ Apart from the weaving room, however, women seldom performed the same tasks as men. Women were concentrated in the low paying spinning room and the winding and slashing department where wages ranged from \$2.25 to \$6.00 a week.⁵⁴ They were totally excluded from the highly skilled, and highly paid jobs. No woman was allowed to break into the ranks of the prestigious loom fixers.⁵⁵ The powerful and also prestigious Spinning Master, Master Carder, and Superintendent of Winding, Weaving and Warping were men employed at between \$15.00 and \$16.00 a week.⁵⁶

51 On the role of institutionalized sexual division of labour as a determinant of wage discrimination see: Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time [1982], p. 262; and Trofimenkoff, "One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices" [1976], p. 77.

52 RCRCL [1889], p. 21.

53 Both male and female weavers at the cotton factory were paid in accordance to the number of looms they worked. See RCRCL [1889], pp. 24 and 76. See also Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time [1982], p. 262.

54 RCRCL [1889], pp. 24, 76.

55 Nominal Census, Halifax [1891]. Based on a 100 percent sample of cotton factory workers.

56 RCRCL [1889], pp. 74, 76, 79.

Publisher Andrew McKinlay employed 20 young women at his company, all of whom worked at ruling the books or sewing their bindings, tasks apparently beneath his male employees.⁵⁷ Henry Bonn, Superintendent of the Mayflower Tobacco Company, reported that the firm employed 21 men and 50 girls and women. The men averaged \$6.00 a week, while the females, assigned to piecework averaged \$3.00 to \$5.00 a week and were employed in different tasks.⁵⁸ At Taylor's Boots and Shoes, the 100 men earned, on average, \$6.00 to \$10.00 a week while the 40 women were paid between \$2.00 and \$6.00. The young women of 15 or 16 years of age earned \$2.00 each week for pasting. No women were involved in cutting the leather, for which they could have earned \$7.00 to \$9.00.⁵⁹ Of the 55 employees who actually worked inside the clothing factory of W. H. Gibson, the 11 male journeymen tailors earned \$9.00 a week in comparison to the \$3.00 average weekly earnings of the tailoresses, who were assigned to piecework. The 45 women who worked at home earned the same as their sisters in the factory, though they may have rented their sewing machines which would have diminished their income.⁶⁰ At the clothing factory of Clayton and Sons, male tailors averaged \$5.00 to \$12.00 in the course of a week. Women who

57 RCRCL [1889], p. 217.

58 RCRCL [1889], p. 19, 73.

59 RCRCL [1889], pp. 16 - 17.

60 RCRCL [1889], p. 7.

worked by the week took only \$1.50 to \$6.00 home to their families, while women on piecework earned, as a maximum limit, \$4.50.⁶¹ Women were concentrated not only in certain industries, but in distinct jobs within those industries.

The ascription of certain tasks to males and other tasks to females, and the accompanying devaluation of wages in female jobs suggest several conclusions. Primarily, the concept of woman's sphere apparently occupied the minds of factory officials. There was a sense that the work women did should, in some way, be different from the work that a man performed. Thus, women were assigned to jobs men were not assigned to [and for which they were paid poorly] or, if assigned to the same job, they were most often paid less for the same work. Secondly, the ghettoization of women by factory managers reflects not only a sense that women's work was different than a man's, but that in theory women should be inferior industrial workers, even if they were not in reality. This impression, generalized and internalized, benefitted the factory owners who could argue women's work was not the same as men's, or of lesser quality and thus of less value. The following exchange between a Royal Commissioner and publisher Andrew McKinlay aptly illustrates management's attitude towards its female labourers:

Q. Have you any book folders in your employ that are experts?

A. All the folding is done by girls.

61 RCRCL (1889), p. 1.

Q. I mean girls.

A. We cannot call them experts.⁶²

The patronizing and condescending attitude of some employers towards their women workers is evident in the testimony of Henry Bonn, Superintendent of the Mayflower Tobacco Company:

Q. Is it the rule that the women who earn day's wages get upwards afterwards?

A. No; I hardly ever take them from that position and put them in the way of promotion, because they do not wish it; the [sic] prefer day's work. I have to get new hands when I want to increase the other work.⁶³

The manager's far-reaching acceptance and utilization of gender division and work devaluation certainly suggests that they found the concept of separate spheres useful. But the sexual division of labour which continued from the pre- and proto-industrial ages to the modern industrial era symbolize more than the infusion of sphere constructs into the workplace. Reflected clearly in the devaluation of women's work was the continued ascription of status and power to men. As men watched over the work of women, transformed women's pieces into valuable finished products, and laboured in the staturesd trades, their patriarchal hegemony was reaffirmed by the structure and culture of the factory. Though industrial women participated in the public sphere of work, they did not participate in a male world of work. Women's experience of out-of-home work suppressed women in an unique way: women

62 RCRCL [1889], p. 217.

63 RCRCL [1889], p. 19.

experienced the dual oppression of their gender, and of their class.

The public work world of Halifax's female industrial worker was inextricably linked to the private hearth. Each day these isolated and fragmented women toiled in factories and their homes to contribute to their own survival and the survival of their families. Independent living was not a long term option for most women who worked in Halifax industry. For the vast majority of these women out-of-home work was a temporary engagement before marriage. The actual experience of the workplace - subjected to male authority and devalued as workers - painted for most women a canvas of exploitation as both low-skilled, low-waged workers, and as women. But they shared with the men the rigid atmosphere of industrial life where time clocks, overseers, and machines demanded order and precision from them. They also shared the culture of Victorian society that saw women and men's roles and attributes as intrinsically different. Each day, after encountering these attitudes in the workplace, industrial women ventured into the world outside the factory walls. There, Victorian notions of moral reform, propagated and espoused by middle-class philanthropists confronted them.

CHAPTER TWO:
FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS AND VICTORIAN HALIFAX REFORMISM

Shortly after 6:00 each morning, Sarah Flack and her four brothers walked from their family home at 92 Kempt Road to the cotton factory down the street. Sarah wove cloth until 6:00 in the evening and then returned home to her parents and her own children: a four-year-old daughter, Bella and a son, Joseph, a mere two years of age.¹ They were probably tended during the day by Sarah's mother who had two young children of her own to care for. The widow Flack, at age twenty-five, was one of many women in Halifax and, indeed in the western world, who was attempting to come to grips with the reality of industrial-capitalist life. And like most industrial women, Sarah was not working for pin money - she was working to support her family.

The experience of industrial women was not a cloistered one. While the concept of 'separate spheres,' - of a male, public world and a female, private world - permeated the Victorian, bourgeois mind-set, the reality was that men and women shared a single world, one which was characterized by a complex series of social relationships.² Women, like Sarah

1 See the nominal Census of Halifax, 1891, Ward 6D, p. 8, Family No. 37. Sarah's father, Thomas, was a house carpenter. Her brothers Henry, John, Arthur, and Daniel were carpenter, weaver, spinner, and carder respectively.

2 For a critique of separate spheres as a tool of analysis see Kelly's "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory," [1983], pp. 259 - 270. Kelly writes, "... the industrial worlds of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries construed society as divided into two socio-sexual spheres.

Flack, who went to work in the industrial factory violated the conception of spheres, the perception of woman's place in society. This chapter examines the response of the middle-class reformers to the industrial, sphere-breaking women of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The Victorian period was a time of rapid social change. Society was fluid and unfamiliar. Industrialization and urbanization caught the unfamiliar and the unlike in a giant web of heterogeneity. The family was challenged to reorganize and redefine itself. Slums and disease advanced, the working-class began to organize and impose itself, and the bourgeoisie grew ever more fearful of losing their hegemony.³ Darwin's theory of evolution questioned notions of fate and divine direction and sent society searching for absolute truths elsewhere. Out of this growth of secularization and search for absolutes flourished "an almost blind faith in the scientific method..." which many who were confused about their changing society embraced "...as if it alone were all that was needed to find solutions for all the

The bourgeois conception of a private and a public domain of work and one of leisure, also separated the sexes. Settling women and men into their respective spheres of home and work, it defined the place and roles of the sexes as separate and "complementary." p. 260.

3 For a brief description of the reasons behind the growing fears of the elite see: Carol Bacchi, "Evolution, Eugenics and Women: the Impact of Scientific Theories on Attitudes Towards Women, 1870 - 1920," Elizabeth Windschuttle, ed., Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australia, 1788 - 1978 (np, 1980), p. 133 and 136.

problems of the age."⁴ Those reformers and philanthropists who wished to rescue Victorian society from the chaos of its time legitimized their activities by wrapping themselves in scientific garb.

Part of the widespread scientific vogue encompassed eugenic theory. The declining birthrate of the better educated and the well-to-do was countered by a "prolific" population of the lower classes, giving rise to fears amongst the bourgeoisie that they were being outbred by the less fit.⁵ This preoccupation with breeding pervaded Victorian society and would steer the reform movement through much of its later voyage. But an insidious danger for women lurked in social preoccupations with biology. "Regardless of different basic precepts," writes Carol Bacchi, "scientific formulations were easily adapted to substantiate sexual stereotypes."⁶

Industrialization and the changes that accompanied it offered some women the opportunity to venture into new areas

4 Saffioti, Women in Class Society [1978], p. 33. The practice of scientific structure underpinning a reform movement was not entirely new to the 19th century. See, for example, Ginnie Smith, "Thomas Tryon's Regimen for Women: Sectarian Health in the Seventeenth Century," London Feminist History Group, The Sexual Dynamics of History (London, 1983), pp. 47 - 65.

5 Bacchi, "Evolution, Eugenics and Women" [1980], pp. 136 - 146.

6 Bacchi, "Evolution, Eugenics and Women" [1980], p. 135.

of society.⁷ While some working-class women went to the factory, middle-class ladies went to school, or took jobs as teachers, clerks and the like. A great number of bourgeois women joined quasi-philanthropic clubs and societies, many of which were concerned with the reform and moral education of society.⁸ In the energies of those groups bourgeois women found outlets for their leisure time and educational training.⁹

The concerns of the reformers were multiple, but the integral sanctity of the family unit, and the notion of women's "proper" role within that sphere, underlay all of their efforts. In the protection of the home, thought the reformers, women could raise a generation of moral children. Christine Stansell writes:

for these middle-class city dwellers, the home was not simply a place of residence; it was a focus of social life and a central element of class-consciousness, based on specific conceptions of femininity and childrearing. There, secluded from

7 Carol Bacchi, Liberation Deferred?: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877 - 1918 (Toronto, 1983), pp. 22 - 23; and Smith, "Female Reformers in Victorian Nova Scotia" [1986], p. 15.

8 So pervasive and sweeping was this movement, that historians have coined the term "women's culture" to "...indicate a set of habits, values, practices, institutions, and a way of seeing the world common to large numbers of middle-class nineteenth-century women and distinct from the characteristic male perspective of the time." Dubois, Feminist Scholarship [1985], p. 56. It is also important to understand the extent to which their views were distinct from the working-class perspective of the time.

9 Smith, "Female Reformers in Victorian Nova Scotia" [1986], p. 25.

the stress of public life, women could devote themselves to directing the moral and ethical development of their families. There, protected from the evils of the outside world, the young could live out their childhoods in innocence, freed from the necessity of labor, cultivating their moral and intellectual faculties.¹⁰

Inherent in the idealization of the family, of course, was the concern for fit breeding. Temperance, physical and spiritual purity, municipal education and welfare reform reached into the private world of the home where moral women could raise a moral generation.¹¹ Some women organized to oppose the higher education of women arguing that the mental strain produced by academic pursuits would cause women to have underdeveloped children. Others argued it would draw women's attention from their true role, that educated women might prefer life in the work-a-day world to family life.

The advocacy of domestic "science" was a cause celebre of late 19th century reformers. Largely motivated by the dwindling supply of servants, the bourgeoisie called for, and often established, schools where young women were trained in methods of household management and scientific motherhood.¹² While the crusade for domesticity provided the reformers with

10 Christine Stansell, "Women, Children and the Uses of the Streets: Class and Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850 - 1860," Linda Kerber and Jane DeHart-Mathews, eds., Women's America: Refocussing the Past (New York, 1987), p. 141.

11 Bacchi, "Evolution, Eugenics and Women" [1980], p. 134.

12 Bacchi, "Evolution, Eugenics and Women" [1980], pp. 140 -145.

a focus for ensuring stability in a world in flux, it also, remarks Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "... severely hampered their view of themselves, of their proper social roles and of their goals."¹³

Although the Reform/Women's movement in the Maritimes was negatively affected by the out-migration of the region's daughters it was, nonetheless, present and vibrant, and it encompassed the far-reaching ideals of the bourgeoisie, especially in their concern for the purity of women.¹⁴ In 1899, for instance, Evelyn Fenwick Kiersted (born in Windsor and a BA and MA graduate from Acadia) addressed a meeting of the King's Daughters of Nova Scotia. Her speech was highly reflective of some of the concerns of the New Woman.¹⁵ "Our nature," she told the women at the meeting, "is threefold, the physical, the mental, the spiritual and it is by bringing

¹³ Fox-Genovese, "Placing Women's History in History," [1982], p. 13.

¹⁴ Conrad, Recording Angels [1983], p. 24.

¹⁵ Linda Kealey refers to the New Woman Movement as "a primarily middle-class women's revolt against the uselessness of a dependent existence [which] emerged in late Victorian Canada just as public attention was focussing on a series of social problems which seemed to threaten the smooth path of progress." "...The experimentation of the 'new woman' with dress reform, bicycle riding, spiritualism and womens' rights became transformed into a concern with the reform movement and the duties of citizenship." Kealey later notes, "the much talked of 'new woman,' who promised to alter substantially the shape of women's lives, became identified with the professional woman, whose career aspirations conformed to maternal feminist expectations." Linda Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s - 1920s (Toronto, 1979), pp. 1 and 14.

these to the highest perfection that we will gain the most influence."¹⁶ But as public as the New Women were and as sincere as their struggles might have been, there were those who denied them any credit for fashioning a new role for women, however limited it was:

There isn't any "new" woman. The components of womanhood, and especially of gentlewomanhood ever have been and must ever be the same. Different times, different places, different social structures put to different tests and uses the fundamental femininity, but the principle is always the same. She is the same good, true-hearted woman whether she is battling with men in the business world or tending to domestic affairs at home; and anyway, in most cases, she veers around to the latter in the end.¹⁷

The participation of women in the wage labourforce caught the attention of reformers. Antithetical to values of private sphere reverence, wage-working women participated daily in the public sphere, challenging bourgeois notions of women's proper role. But the bourgeois critiques of working women were not so blatant as to order women back to the home; rather, they were wrapped in eugenic concern that whispered of maternalism. "A question which suggests itself for consideration" read a column in the Amherst Daily News, "is whether woman is doing more of the work of the world than fell to her lot in the past, and whether the work she does is likely to have an injurious effect on the future development

¹⁶ Tamara Adilman, "Women's Influence: Evelyn Fenwick Kiersted," Atlantis, Vol. 9, No. 1 [1983], p. 94.

¹⁷ Amherst Daily News, 16 January, 1903, p. 4.

of the race?"¹⁸ While advocating the establishment of a technical school for young women, a columnist in the Mail Star wrote:

Each year, large numbers of girls are obliged to leave the public schools at the ages between 13 and 17 and go to work. Many of them are compelled to aid in the support of the family, and all untrained as they are, the girls have to take employment as they can find it - in factories and shops, at very small wages. They have no trade, no resource, and no chance to learn a trade, as boys have. It is lamentable of course, that girls are obliged to work, but it is a fact and should be faced.¹⁹

Indeed there seems to be both an uneasy acceptance of the fact that many women were driven to work outside the home from sheer economic necessity and a quiet fear of what this public participation of women might spawn. "It is not a thorough absurdity," wrote a columnist in the Halifax Herald, "to see a possible day when 'man, proud man, the noblest work of God,' and all the rest of it will be driven clear out of business and left at home while his beloved struggles 'on change.' I confess to a very old-fashioned idea of what is women's sphere... ." But he went on to note, "it is still a fact that there are many unmarried and some married women upon whom rest obligations which they must either meet or starve, and many hundreds of girls whom Providence has placed in circumstances where self-support, at least in part, is a

¹⁸ Amherst Daily News 27 May, 1907, p. 2.

¹⁹ Mail Star, 28 November, 1908 in HLCW, Scrapbook, 1908 - 1917 [PANS MG 20 Vol. 204].

duty as well as a necessity."²⁰ But there were those persistent ostriches for whom women's wage-work was beyond understanding. "But what is the cause for this great army of woman workers?" wondered one. "Authorities differ; they all agree, however, that neither the condition of our womankind nor our national ideals, nor the indifference of our men, nor actual conditions of poverty make it necessary."²¹

In an article entitled "Danger of the Street," a reformer expressed concern about young women loitering on Barrington and Gottingen streets. She feared for the moral degeneration of the girls but her tone seems to suggest both maternal concern and indignation shaped by Victorian standards of propriety:

We are not prepared to discuss the morals of these girls, but someone has said that conduct is as important as morals, and surely their conduct is of the kind that leads away from healthy, wholesome self-respect to careless, easy familiarity, from modesty to brazenness. Who has not noted the careless gesture, the pert remark, and the silly giggle of the 'pick-up?' Then there is the walk, the inviting dark doorway, and the 'date' to be kept on a subsequent night.

The whole effect upon them is insidious and degrading. The young girl must hear conversation unfit for her ears, she must attain worldly knowledge that she never should attain, she must grow careless, 'flip,' and used to the 'license of touch.' She will lose the essential qualities of womanliness that command every man's respect. In some cases,

20 Herald, 5 November, 1902, p. 4.

21 Herald, 1 February, 1908, p. 6.

the girl will go down and out, and the end will be ruin, sorrow and misery.²²

The factory and its women workers did not escape the reformers' scrutiny. Many simply dismissed the factory toil of women which, they were convinced, made women "puny, anaemic, [and] dyspeptic" and therefore less fit for breeding.²³ Alice Klein and Wayne Roberts argue that women working in factories offended the moral sensibilities of the reformers. Factory work not only provided men and women a common workplace, but also interfered with a woman's role as mother.²⁴ Reformers in Halifax took notice of female factory

22 "Danger of the Street: Where Lieth Responsibility?" PANS MG 100, Vol. 248, No. 21. Emphasis is in the original. Christine Stansell writes "...Street life was antagonistic to ardently held beliefs about childhood, womanhood and ultimately, the nature of civilized urban society. The middle-class of which the reformers were a part was only emerging, an economically ill-defined group, neither rich nor poor, just beginning in the antebellum years to assert a distinct cultural identity. Central to its self-conception was the ideology of domesticity, a set of sharp ideas and pronounced opinions about the nature of a moral family life." Christine Stansell, "Women, Children and the Uses of the Streets" [1987], pp. 132 - 133.

23 Bacchi, "Evolution, Eugenics and Women" [1980], p. 141.

24 Klein and Roberts, "Besieged Innocence: The 'Problem' and Problems of Working Women" [1974], p. 213 state that "the increasing number of women in the workforce and the dismal conditions they faced was primarily a threat to the reformer's definition of the social and moral fibre of society. In particular, it touched anxieties flowing from their traditional view of women. Some women were defined as the bearers of the moral standard of the nation, their entry into a workforce dominated by an amoral male ethic that subjected them to temptation and distracted them from their true calling of motherhood was indeed a critical aspect of the social crises."

workers and what they saw concerned some of them. Indeed those who [as mentioned above] would go "down and out" were factory girls. The author of "Danger of the Street" proclaimed that "by far the larger numbers of these girls work in factories or at housework during the day... ." Distrust of factory life was common. Reformers could do little to prevent women from engaging in factory work and in some cases seemed to understand the necessity of women's wage-work. But the warm arms of Halifax's maternal feminist reformers did not embrace these women as one might expect.

Like their counterparts in most of the western world, the middle-class, reform-minded women of Halifax joined reform groups and societies. The most significant of these groups was the Halifax Local Council of Women. The Council was significant, not solely for what it accomplished, but because it best encompassed the general precepts of reform in Halifax. The Local Council was an umbrella organization for the numerous philanthropic and reform groups in the city; the Halifax Temperance Union, the various church guilds, the King's Daughters, the Ladies Auxilliary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty, and other groups - 21 of them in all - sent delegates to the meeting's of the Local Council.²⁵

²⁵ HLCW, History of the Halifax Local Council of Women, PANS MG 20 Vol. 1054, No. 1, p. 18. The Constitution of the Halifax Local Council of Women reads: "Believing that the more intimate knowledge of one another's work will result in larger mutual sympathy, and a greater unity of thought, and, therefore, in a more effective action, certain Associations of women have determined to organize a Council of Women... ."

The Halifax Local Council of Women was a unit of the National Council of Women. Wealthy and influential women who shared the maternal feminist reform spirit joined to guard people from "...society's web of amoral forces." Veronica Strong-Boag argues that by adopting the maternal feminist philosophy, the Council legitimized its activities:

...the council relied heavily on its faith in a common core of femininity. According to the majority of the Council's spokesmen, women's maternal nature supplied the sine quo non of the female personality. This distinctive character justified the Council's very existence and all women's intervention outside the home. "Mothering" was not to be restricted to a single household but extended almost indefinitely throughout society.²⁶

The Council grouped the concerns of women with the issues and concerns of youth. This is not surprising. The National Council clearly saw women's destiny as motherhood and the guardianship of the human race. Out-of-home work, according to the National Council, interfered with women's proper destiny. Thus any programme aimed at the improvement of working-class women was not, according to Klein and Roberts,

Article II states that "the council shall serve as a medium of communication and a means of promoting any work of common interest." HLCW, Constitution of the Halifax Council of Women, PANS MG 20 Vol. 538, No. 1.

²⁶ Veronica Strong-Boag, The Parliament of Women; The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893 - 1929 [Ottawa, 1976], p. 7.

launched to improve their condition as workers, but as women whose femininity was at risk.²⁷

The Halifax Local Council of Women was founded on a hot summer afternoon in 1894, when leading female figures of Halifax's bourgeois reform movement gathered for the purpose. A fierce sense that they were the mothers and guardians of society, a doctrine of maternal feminism, was evident. Lady Aberdeen, founder of the National/Local Council movement [and later, the founder of the Victorian Order of Nurses] hoped the women had "...met together fully alive to the high duties and responsibilities which are ours in virtue of our being women."²⁸ She added "...must we not feel that God has set a high and holy seal on our womanhood, and on all the special work which belongs to it. We may not all be called upon to be the mothers of little children, but every woman who is born is called upon to 'mother' in some way or another; and woe be to her if she turn aside from her high privileges."²⁹ Mrs. Archibald^d told the gathering that "every woman attending

²⁷ Klein and Roberts "Besieged Innocence" [1974], p. 214 - 216. The National Council's preoccupation with separate toilets, a concern they shared with the Royal Commissioners on Capital and Labor, reflects the Victorian concern for modesty, purity, and wifely attributes. [p. 215]

²⁸ HLCW, Minute Book [1894], PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 1.

²⁹ HLCW, Inaugural Meeting of the Local Council of Women of Halifax, PANS MG 20 Vol. 1054, No. 2, p. 12. See Smith's "Female Reformers in Victorian Nova Scotia" [1986] where she explores the transition from a more radical feminist critique of the Reformers to the maternal feminist analysis.

here today has something to do with the destinies of Canada. As we build now, so will the national life of the future be the better or worse for us."³⁰ This attitude of guardianship and the actions of the Halifax Local Council epitomized the Victorian reform spirit.

The Halifax Council advocated suffrage, temperance, the censorship of shows, and warned of the dangers of "pernicious" literature.³¹ They argued that women who bore more than one illegitimate child should be imprisoned.³² The police, they thought, should have a covered wagon with which prisoners could be moved about the city. When they addressed the subject of prisons they advocated the separation of the young male offenders from the older, hardened criminals. The Council was horrified to find the sick and dying mixed amongst the paupers in the poorhouse and took up the cause of separate homes for the incurables, children and the feeble-minded. The reformers established and financed supervised playgrounds and a Women's Hospital and they eventually had a woman appointed to the School Board.³³ A curfew bill was one

³⁰ HLCW, History of the Halifax Local Council of Women, PANS MG 20 Vol. 1054, No. 1, p. 17.

³¹ HLCW, Minute Book 27 June, 1910, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 4.

³² HLCW, Minute Book, 20 February, 1896, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 1.

³³ HLCW, History of the Local Council of Women, PANS MG 20 Vol. 1054, No. 1; HLCW, Minute Book, 27 April, 1900; 6 February, 1902; 19 March, 1903; and various dates, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 3. Note that the concern for the separation

of the recurring issues of the Local Council, but many members of the Council opposed such a measure, saying that such bills had not worked elsewhere and would not work in Halifax.³⁴ Instead, the reformers advocated the opening of a night school for the teaching of domestic science. This suggestion grew out of the Local Council's main concern: the training of domestics.

Halifax suffered a shortage of domestic servants in the late nineteenth-century. Factories and shops lured women out of the domestic service, promising that at the end of the work day women could leave the control of their bosses. The Local Council felt that schools would not only provide well-trained domestics, but would restore dignity and a sense of professionalism to the occupation. In 1896, Mrs. Archibald moved a resolution to study the feasibility of establishing a domestic licence for housekeepers. Such a licencing requirement would, she argued, not only restore prestige to the profession, but would promote the "right relations between mistress and maid."³⁵ The shortage of domestics concerned the Council well into the twentieth-century. While

of "undesirables" from the other groups in society is a reflection of the Victorian preoccupation with notions of contagion.

³⁴ HLCW, Minute Book, 3 October, 1899; 21 November, 1907, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 3.

³⁵ HLCW, Minute Book, 30 January, 1896, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 1.

Council members had difficulty in securing the employment of a servant, their concerns went beyond their personal predicaments. What most bothered the Council members was that women were choosing non-domestic work as an alternative, and thus breaching the concept of woman's role. The Local Council's scrapbook contains a clipping from the Mail calling for the institution of domestic schools. It is clearly meant to appeal to those who found women's new roles offensive.

All those who raise the cry against the "modern woman," should use their influence to establish a thorough course in sewing and cooking and allied arts, where girls can learn these womanly pursuits in a thorough and interesting way. Then will the workingmen as well as the businessmen benefit in pocket and health by having wives and daughters who can make home more homelike by their womanly skill.³⁶

How could these women, especially industrial women, be the guardians and mothers of society if they were denying the primacy of woman's role in the home? Moreover, the grouping of working class women in industrial settings threatened social unrest. What would the future of Halifax be if the working classes revolted and robbed the bourgeoisie of their hegemony?

The minutes of the Halifax Local Council of Women contain few references to factory women. The minutes of July, 1895 record a request from the National Council asking the Local to form a subcommittee to report the working hours for women and children and to investigate the existence or

non-existence of a female factory inspector. Three months later the committee reported that the women at the cotton factory worked from 6:30 to 6:30 and that women who worked in other industrial establishments had a shorter work-day.³⁷ The issue died. When committees were appointed in 1899, no committee to deal with industrial women was appointed. Later that year the National Council requested information on the Factory Act and on factory inspection. There was no response.³⁸ In March of 1899, the Council passed a resolution calling on the Nova Scotia Legislature to regulate the hours of work of women and children and to appoint a woman to inspect factories.³⁹ A Factory Act was passed in Nova Scotia in 1901. It limited the hours of work for women and children and forbade the involvement of children and women in tasks which were likely to cause permanent injury.⁴⁰

After the turn of the century, the Council become somewhat more concerned about industrial women. In the winter of 1906, a Mrs. Egan read a report commissioned to study laws related to women and children. No girl under 16

³⁷ HLCW, Minute Book, July, 1895; 31 October, 1895, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 1.

³⁸ HLCW, Minute Book, 17 February, 1899; 24 March, 1899, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 2.

³⁹ HLCW, Minute Book, 24 March, 1899, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 2. Note also that in the spring of 1897 the Council had called for a national act limiting the work week to 54 hours. Halifax Herald, 28 May, 1897, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Nova Scotia, Statutes of Nova Scotia, "Factory Act," Sec. 9, p. 1420, and Sec. 11.

and no boy under 14, she reported, was to be employed longer than 72 hours a week. Mrs. Egan did not investigate the status of working women and the report was referred back to the committee to "further enquire into laws concerning working women and to note any flagrant abeyance of these laws, with a view to our asking, from the Provincial government for the appointment of a woman factory inspector." Almost a year later the committee reported that the Factory Act contained a provision for the appointment of a female inspector, but no such appointment had been made. In the spring of 1907, Reverend Foster Almon visited the President of the Council and asked that her group pressure the Government to appoint inspectors. A month later, the President announced that the Children's Aid Society would work in conjunction with the Local Council to pressure for the appointment of an inspector.⁴¹

Given the deep concern the Local Council expressed for the reform of society - and, indeed, its successful advocacy of many causes - why were these women willing only to involve themselves in a most peripheral and half-hearted way in the struggle to achieve better working conditions for female factory workers? What does their lack of involvement suggest about the reformers' perceptions of factory women in Halifax? In a society struggling to come to terms with the massive

⁴¹ HLCW, Minute Book, 12 February, 1906; 20 November, 1906; 8 April, 1907; 13 May, 1907, PANS MG 20 Vol. 535, No. 3.

changes produced by modern industrial capitalism, stability was a source of comfort. Carol Bacchi has argued, quite correctly, that a group who feared working-class unrest would not advocate unionism and strikes.⁴² Not only did the reformers fear the potential crises these women could pose, but the fact that they were in factories, and out of the home challenged the reformers' belief that the private sphere [of reproduction] was the appropriate place for women.⁴³ At the same time, middle-class women could not blatantly agitate for the return of factory women to the private sphere; the reformers, in their public and social role, had violated the spheres themselves. But the Council did attempt to apply the reform they advocated generally to the factory women. By espousing the doctrine of maternalism and guardianship, and by their strong advocacy of domestic training as a prerequisite for marriage, and thus child-bearing, the Council reaffirmed the family and private sphere as the proper role for women. As a result, the public sphere was seen as less desirable. Young women who might earn enough to support themselves, though they were very rare, and young married women who potentially could continue in the factory after marriage, left the factory upon marriage because it was part of the normative process. Smelser and Halpern suggest "...in

42 Bacchi, "Evolution, Eugenics and Women" [1980], p. 134.

43 Klein and Roberts, "Besieged Innocence" [1974], p.213 also makes this point.

the historical development of any society certain value premises emerge as dominant and become the basis for legitimizing the society's major institutional structures, its normative [including legal] framework, and its system of social controls."⁴⁴ Faced with the opportunity to fashion a new role for women, the reformers of Halifax, like late Victorian social reformers throughout North America, reaffirmed women's reverential role in the private sphere. Industrial women accepted that view and with it, an essentially conservative definition of their womanhood. The hopes of the reformers were realized: though women still worked in factories, a transitory female workforce was unlikely to organize and produce working-class unrest.⁴⁵ Secondly, the "proper sphere" was ultimately accepted by industrial women, the same women they most feared would reject it.

⁴⁴ Smelser and Halpern, John Demos and Sarane Spence Boocock, eds., Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family [Chicago, 1978], p. 5299.

⁴⁵ In The Anatomy of Poverty (1974), Terry Copp argues that the "preponderance of young women, who it was generally presumed would marry and take up unpaid work in their homes, may account for the widespread indifference to the plight of the female worker." [p. 44] While Copp's point that the transitory nature of a young female workforce may account for the lack of reformers' concern for women workers is valid, it ignores the reason behind the composition of the female workforce. The workforce was predominantly unmarried because the normative culture of the society, reinforced by the reformers, instructed women to marry and directed married women not to work outside the home.

Sarah Flack's Halifax was a complex society. Reality as Sarah knew it was toiling in the cotton factory all day to support her children and returning home to care for them in the few hours left before they slept. But in that daily routine Sarah, perhaps unconsciously, encountered the Victorian concept of 'woman's place.' In the factory, she was paid less than her brothers were and she was refused entrance to certain jobs. As a woman, Sarah had a place within the factory, and it was a place which implied inferior status. Outside the factory, Sarah's role was clearly defined. While the circumstances of her widowhood in some senses rendered her out-of-home work acceptable, Victorian sensibilities would dictate her remarriage and exit from the workforce. The reformers, like the factory officials, had a firm sense that women were different than men and that they had different roles to play. In fact they perceived different spheres of existence and benefitted from the concept of spheres. To the factory officials the nurturing role of women in the private sphere, which implied physical weakness, justified the devaluation of women's wage labour. They transplanted the concept of separate spheres directly into the factory which was to their direct advantage as managers in the capitalist system. In so doing, in dividing and categorizing their workforces, they assured the efficiency of their system and their status within it. To the reformers, spheres justified the maternal feminist crusade for domestic

training and the moral education of young women, and thus reinforced the cultural edicts which made the family and private sphere the proper place for women. The threat of working-class uprising, at least from women, was significantly diminished. Spheres provided bourgeois women a means of assuring their hegemony, their place and class power in society but, most especially, within the family.

CHAPTER THREE:
FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS AND HUMAN AGENCY

"We are not going to work!" they said. Nine women removed their aprons, dug their filleting knives into their wooden work tables, and walked out of the Christie Fish Company. It was the early spring of 1910 in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The fish 'lassies' had arrived from Scotland the previous October under a one year employment contract. Six months later, they had had quite enough.

The women were paid only \$4.00 a week, though they had been promised \$5.00. Employed to clean, fillet and pack fish, they found themselves also gathering seaweed and periwinkles, carrying cord wood, and making boxes. They claimed that they were sometimes locked out when they arrived late and that if they worked past 6:30 pm they received no extra pay for their overtime. Overseers, they reported, used profane language towards them. When the women were ordered to split the heads of pickled fish and remove the bones, they refused and left the company. They took care not to portray their action as a strike or walkout. The women argued that they only wanted to be "treated freeman."

Christie argued that there were no grounds for the walkout; if anything, the women "...had been treated too well." He claimed he was providing them with free rent, fuel and light, and \$5.00 in weekly wages. He argued that the lassies were poor workers, that he often went to their homes

to ask them to come to work, and had paid them for days they did not work.

At the request of the women, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty investigated the dispute. Mrs. Egan of the SPC and Chief of Police McKenzie found the girls were not provided with coal, which Christie quickly agreed to supply. At the urging of A. Milne Fraser, president of the North British Society, James Halliday, vice-president of the same organization, and Secretary Murray of the SPC, Christie provided the women with a housemother for their lodging quarters and promised that the lassies would be made to work only with fresh fish. The women agreed and returned to work three days after their assertion of freemanship had begun.¹

The Christie Fish Company walkout is interesting for several reasons. The terms of the settlement clearly reflect the preoccupations of the late-Victorian mindset. Despite the fact that the lassies issued no complaint about their living arrangements, two of the three settlement terms addressed the 'private' world of the home. That the middle-class activists of the SPC were preoccupied with the personal, domestic life of the women was in keeping with the general bourgeois-Victorian obsession with retaining the

¹ Daily Echo, 30 April, 1910, p. 2; 2 May, 1910, p. 7; Herald, 3 May, 1910, p. 3. A search of the records of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty have revealed no statement or notation regarding the fishworker dispute. SPC, Men, Women and Children Cases, PANS MG 20 Vol. 515, No. 3; and SPC Minute Book, March 21, 1907 - 1925, PANS MG 20 Vol. 517, No. 2.

health and purity of the home and women's place therein. The appointment of a housemother was made not because the lassies wanted one, but because she would provide the young women with moral guidance, supervision, and an example of domesticity. The middle-class reformers must have been delighted at this outcome.

The Christie agitation is interesting above all because it was a unique episode in the history of Halifax's working women. These young women, employed at pre-industrial work in a proto-industrial setting, were the only group of women in the Halifax area to assert themselves so strongly and conspicuously in the pre-World War I era. No other Halifax women struck. Even the first generation of industrial women - confronted by the harsh realities of industrial capitalism and the massive changes and challenges it produced - was relatively inconspicuous. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the industrial women of Halifax were quiescent and docile.

While industrial capitalism imposed oppressive structures and controls upon its labourers, labour could test the soundness of those structures and challenge the authority and pervasiveness of the controls. Whether by formal means [unions, strikes, walkouts, boycotts] or informal means [disobedience, cultural expression, kin clustering], workers could shape their lived experience. If the theatre was one

of oppression, they were vibrant actors on its stage. Thomas

Dublin notes:

We are born into a world not of our own making or choice, and society provides the raw materials that shape all our efforts to recast it. But just as men and women are acted upon by a world they have inherited from the past, they act in turn upon that world. As it makes them, they also make themselves and transform the world.²

Feminist historians and women's historians continue to debate the extent to which this kind of Thompsonian theory, or neo-Marxism, is useful in understanding the experience of women. They have often argued that traditional Marxism, with its imposition of a structurally imposed "class" does not allow for an understanding of the distinct experiences of women as workers. Moreover, they argue, structural Marxism ignores the existence of patriarchy and the consequent oppression of women. Neo-marxism has added fuel to the fire in that debate. Some of those who are interested in the historical experience of women question the validity of examining women's agency when oppression, they argue, was the most essential and fundamental experience of our foremothers.³ Sheila Johansson wrote:

² Dublin, Women at Work [1979], p. 2. For the impetus of Dublin's interpretation see: Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class [1984], especially the preface.

³ For a sampling of this debate see in particular Dubois, Feminist Scholarship [1985]; see also Cott and Pleck's "Introduction," in their A Heritage of Her Own [1979], pp. 9 - 24; Judith Newton, et. al. eds., Sex and Class in Women's History [1983]; and Saffioti, Women in Class Society [1978].

The most interesting and significant aspect of the history of women as a field is its potential for showing us that females, handicapped or not, did things ... that affected the structure, function and historical unfolding of their societies.

Ellen Dubois responds, arguing that:

... oppression is a central organizing concept. Even feminist scholars who focus on women's agency and active resistance continue to emphasize that such activity occurs within given social and cultural limits and that resistance means resistance to specific conditions of oppression.⁴

This chapter examines the ways in which industrial-working women of Halifax shaped their experience as workers within an environment of systemic class and gender oppression, and suggests reasons why women's assertions were less than radical.

Except for her sisters, Elizabeth did not know the women she worked with at Moirs.¹ Occasionally she recognized a familiar face from her school days, but these women were not her friends. There was little sense of loyalty or even commonality. She spent her time as did most women she says, "...looking out for yourself." When a rumor began that a young woman was attempting to organize a union, she was promptly dismissed. The rumor was untrue.⁵ Elizabeth never struck, never walked out, and never boycotted. She was, it

4 Dubois, Feminist Scholarship [1979], pp. 49 and 86.

5 Oral History Interview Elizabeth M.

appears, like all industrial women of Halifax with the exception of the Christie Company fish women.⁶

Yet women in other places demonstrated that they could shape their industrial lives through labour activism.⁷ As early as 1824, 202 women joined with the men in a mill turnout in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The next year, American women mounted their first independent strike when some New York city garment workers formed the United Tailloresses and struck for higher wages.⁸ In her study of cotton working women in Quebec, Gail Cuthbert Brandt has shown that women were not "passive pawns" in the workforce. Individually and collectively, women endeavored to defend themselves from the exploitive nature of capitalism. She notes that in 10 of the 15 walkouts during the second World War, women comprised over

6 Note however that in the autumn of 1899 male weavers at the Nova Scotia cotton Manufacturing Company struck. There is no indication that women were activists in that strike. It does appear, however, that some of the men strikers pulled other family members from the factory when they struck. Some men returned to the mill mid-strike and took their families back to work with them. The extent to which women encouraged, agreed, or even participated in those moves is not known. The strike can be followed in the Acadian Recorder, 1899, 2 November, p. 2; 7 Nov., p. 3; 20 Nov., p. 3; 24 Nov., p. 3; and 19 Dec., p. 3.

7 For studies of women's strikes, walkouts and boycotts see among others Sarah Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Unions [London, 1987]; Mari Jo Buhle, Women and American Socialism, 1870 - 1920 [Urbana, 1981]; The Corrective Collective, Never Done [1974]; Dublin, Women at Work [1970]; Barbara Mayer-Wertheimer, "The Factory Bell," Linda K. Kerber and Jane DeHart-Mathews, eds., Women's America: Refocussing the Past [New York, 1987], pp. 148 - 157.

8 Mayer-Wertheimer, "The Factory Bell" [1987], p. 151.

40 percent of the walkers.⁹ While women's lack of formal activism in Halifax may have stemmed, in part, from their lack of unionization, the non-unionization of Halifax women conformed to the North American norm. Alice Kessler-Harris has found that from 1900 to 1920 only 1 in 15 American industrial women were unionized whereas 1 in 5 men were union members.

In his study of early female wage earners in Canada, Wayne Roberts isolated four reasons why women were not involved in unions: the drain of potential leadership, fear and compliancy, workforce fragmentation and union attitudes.¹⁰ Roberts found that most working women were young and single, supporting themselves, or contributing to the family wage, a pattern identical to that of Halifax. As in Halifax, most young women left the labourforce upon marriage. When asked if his hands had worked for a long time at his factory, Superintendent Bonn of The Mayflower Tobacco Company replied, "we are constantly changing... ." ¹¹

⁹ Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "The Transformation of Women's Work in the Quebec Cotton Industry, 1920 - 1950," Bryan D. Palmer, ed., The Character of Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History, 1850- 1985 (Toronto, 1986), pp. 115 - 136.

¹⁰ Roberts, Honest Womanhood [1976]; Also see Alice Kessler-Harris, "Where are the Organized Women Workers?" Linda Kerber and Jane De-Hart Matthews, eds., Women's America: Refocussing the Past (New York, 1987), p. 238 for the same arguments. For this argument within a traditional Marxist framework see Saffio, Women in Class Society [1987], p. 69.

¹¹ RCRCI, [1889], p. 20.

Occupying such a relatively short time in the workforce, women failed to develop an entrenched hierarchy from which female union leadership could develop: the workforce was too transitory.¹² The female labourforce of the Halifax cotton factory reflects the concentration of young women in industry. They were at a stage of personal transition between their family of origin and family of orientation. Fully 78 percent of the women in the factory were aged 20 or under. Only 2.2 percent of the women were aged 30 or more. Only one married woman worked in the factory.¹³ The youth of the workforce clearly demonstrates the exit of women from the workforce upon marriage. Because a woman spent at the most a few years at the factory she was unlikely to develop a leadership role.

The fear and compliancy Roberts isolated as factors restricting the formal agency of women also applied to the factory women of Halifax. At Moir's, even the unfounded rumour that a woman was involved in creating a union resulted in her dismissal and it might also have resulted in her blacklisting in the Halifax area. Robert Taylor stated that

12 Palmer, Working-Class Experience (1983), p. 27; Roberts, Honest Womanhood (1976), p. 53. In his study of female cotton mill workers, Thomas Dublin found the women were very mobile, working on average 14 month stints and then returning to visit their rural families. The average length of employment of a woman at the Hamilton Company mill was only one and a quarter years. Dublin, Women at Work (1979), p. 184.

13 Data compiled from a 100 percent sample of cotton workers in Halifax in the Nominal Census (1889).

if his workers struck he would replace them and let them "come back with their fingers in their mouths wanting work again."¹⁴ When spinners at the Halifax cotton factory refused to work past 6:00, the manager threatened to replace them with operatives from England.¹⁵ The central importance of the female industrial worker's contribution to the family wage economy, or to her self-support, discouraged radical assertions of autonomy. The threat of dismissal and/or blacklisting could threaten their very subsistence.

Workforce fragmentation certainly thwarted a spirit of collectivity amongst Halifax's industrial women. Dispersed throughout the neighbourhoods of the city, separated by factory, divided by workroom, isolated by rules restricting them from talking to each other, a female factory worker in Halifax was disassociated from her toiling sisters. Elizabeth did not even know the women within her workroom. Women in other rooms at Moir's were foreign to her. Women in other industries had no place in Elizabeth's interpretation of her life. This sense of isolation was also found among other women. A young carder told the labour commission that she did not know if there were any women from "the old country" in her mill.¹⁶ There were.

14 RCRCL [1889], p. 16.

15 RCRCL [1889], p. 204.

16 RCRCL [1889], p. 208. See also The Corrective Collective, Never Done [1974], p. 85 for this point.

The integration of in-home and out-of-home work served further to fracture women's unity.¹⁷ The isolation of homeworkers was acute. About 300 hands worked at Clayton and Sons clothery but of those, only 100 worked in the factory; the other 200 worked at home. Moreover they worked only occasionally for Clayton, selling their labour to whomever was in need of it at a given time. At the clothing firm of Doull and Miller, 55 of the 125 employees worked in the building; the rest worked on at-home piecework.¹⁸

The lack of unionization among Halifax's industrial women can be attributed, in part, to the debate about women's role in the workforce and in society in general. The introduction of women into public sphere labour created concern among their male co-workers. Susan Trofimenkoff, versed in the testimony offered to the Labour Commission, notes, "... these men also knew that women's work was different from theirs. Now the existence of factories implied - although did not always ensure - that women's work could be the same as men's, might even be better and usually was cheaper." As a result, suggests Heleith Saffioti, men and women were pitted in a battle against each other.¹⁹

¹⁷ Dublin, Women at Work [1979], p. 16 for a discussion of the integration of industrial and pre-industrial economies.

¹⁸ RCRCL [1889], pp. 1 and 7.

¹⁹ Trofimenkoff, "One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices" [1977], p. 76. See also: Kessler-Harris, "Where are The Organized Women Workers?" [1987], p. 240; and Saffioti, Women in Class Society [1978], p. 50, 70 and 87.

Laura Struminger argues that such a debate undermined the creation of the working class. "The division between men and women workers," she suggests, "slowed the development of the working class, by confusing proletarian consciousness with debates on the appropriate sphere for women workers."²⁰ Struminger and Saffioti's argument seems valid; yet it is, I think, compromised. While it accounts for the failure of class to be made across gender lines and helps to explain the slow development of total working class consciousness, it ignores the failure of women to construct a class identity for themselves, as women workers. While it is important to understand why class fails to be made across gender lines, it is equally important to examine the extent to which class and solidarity was or was not made within a specific gender group. Is it justified to argue that because industrial women shared the same gender they shared a collective working class culture or gender group identity? Elizabeth suggests not. She and her cohorts were concerned with their individual survival, not a collective survival. Documented evidence shows that Elizabeth was not alone in her assertion of individualism.

In November 1912, the Halifax press swelled with controversy surrounding the level of women's wages. A series of letters argued that wages should be increased or women

²⁰ Laura Struminger, Women and the Making of the Working Class: Lyon, 1830 - 1870 (Montreal, 1979), p. 1.

would turn to prostitution for survival. "In plain words," wrote one concerned citizen, "these girls are on the point of starvation... ." Writers called for increased funding to the YWCA so its services could match those of the YMCA. In response, a young woman who worked at Moir's and earned \$5.00 a week wrote:

If a girl earns \$3.00 a week, it's almost certain it's because she isn't worth more. [...] I don't want any charitable person to take an interest in me. I can manage my own business affairs.²¹

Such individual self-preservation was antithetical to class consciousness. E. P. Thompson notes "... class happens when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."²² It seems that women's sense of a shared working culture, if it existed at all, was severely limited.

All of the factors which discouraged women's unionization and radical activism played themselves out in a context of Victorian social values. Family, domesticity, nurturance, and purity characterized the Victorian notion of

²¹ See the Herald, 27 Nov. and 4 Dec., 1912, pp. 16 and 9 respectively. The comments of the citizen were not purely philanthropic. Still displaying a sense of Victorian mistrust of working women she wrote "perhaps it is their own fault. Perhaps they spend their earnings in 'feathers and folderalls,' and so have to herd together Could they be clean or decent under such circumstances?"

²² Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class [1984], p. 8.

women's proper role. The exit of women from the industrial labourforce upon marriage suggests women internalized that view. Women's self-definition revolved around the family, and their role within the private sphere of the home. As a result, young industrial women came to see their out-of-home work as a stage of transition in the passage to adulthood. That sense of temporary engagement in the wageforce affirmed the escapability of factory life. To organize active agency would have flown in the face of women's self-definition.

These factors did more than simply make unionizing activity difficult from an organizer's point of view. A society struggling with a new role for women, men who feared the loss of their power and hegemony, and an oppressed workforce fractured amongst itself, their economic survival tied to a family unit, obstructed women's vision of themselves as a collectivity of interests. The industrial women of Halifax did not acknowledge a shared culture of gender, nor did they identify with each other across the lines of industry. If class is a "social and cultural formation"²³ which is made, the industrial women of Halifax did not live a social and cultural experience which encouraged the creation of an active class identity. Nonetheless, women could and did shape their experience of industrial order and the structure of the order itself.

²³ Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class [1984], p. 11.

Elizabeth was not allowed to talk while she worked. No one sang songs about dipping chocolates, nor was her work performed to the rhythm of a work rhyme. The "boss" kicked her chair if she uttered a word. Many young women at Moirs who objected to something in their worklives shaped their experience in the most forceful way they could: they quit. Elizabeth noted that job opportunities were so plentiful that leaving one factory for another was possible. Indeed the low rate of unemployment among Halifax's female industrial workers - 2.3 percent in 1891 - seems to suggest leaving one factory for another did not pose a substantive risk for some women.²⁴ Rather than stay and try actively to change the circumstances of their work, women sought a new workplace. Elizabeth was no exception. She apprenticed at Moirs' for the requisite two years. When her apprenticeship finished, Elizabeth thought herself quite a skilled dipper; skilled enough, in fact, to be assigned to piecework. She was, however, put on wage work. Elizabeth wrote to Moir and requested to be put on pieces. Moir returned her letter saying that only he would decide when she was ready for piecework. Elizabeth quit and worked as a clerk at various shops throughout the city. Eight years later, she returned to Moirs where she worked a five day week instead of the six days shops required. In her actions, Elizabeth fashioned her own world of work. She, and others like her, also shaped the

24 Nominal Census [1891], Halifax.

structure of industrial capitalism by creating a highly mobile, transitory workforce.²⁵

But women could transform their workworld in less authoritative ways. In North America's largest cotton mill, Amoskeag, workers sang and even danced across the workroom floor. They created an atmosphere of revelry and camaraderie.²⁶ In the absence of day care, women sometimes took their babies to the factories where they worked.²⁷ When managers announced a wage cut for Lowell cotton workers, women withdrew their accounts from the company owned bank en masse.²⁸ Jonathan Prude has carefully reconstructed the cautious assertions of women. Absenteeism, stealing, slow downs, dressing up as an assertion of femininity, whispering campaigns, candle parties, and the use of special jargon created a workworld for women, by women.²⁹

The informal activism of workers was often violent. Ohio laborers burned farm machinery. Polish day laborers and their wives broke paving equipment. Civil War Blacks

25 Bonn, Superintendent of the Mayflower Tobacco factory commented on the "constantly changing" composition of his workforce. RCRCL [1889], p. 20. See Dublin, Women at Work [1979], p. 23 for a discussion of the job mobility of young women in Lowell, New Hampshire.

26 Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time [1982], p. 77.

27 The Corrective Collective, Never Done [1974], p. 102.

28 Mayer-Wertheimer, "The Factory Bell," [1987], p. 151.

29 Jonathan Prude, The Coming of Industrial Order [1983], p. 137 - 140.

dismantled gins and hid them after missionaries tried to make them plant cotton. Brooklyn ropemakers burned the rope they had made.³⁰ Workers in Halifax sometimes resorted to violence. Ernest Gardner, for example, was fined \$20.00 or 90 days in jail for assaulting his factory manager.³¹ A worker at the Dartmouth Rope Works dumped a bucket of scalding water on manager George Stairs when he walked beneath a window.³²

But the Halifax workforce could also assert itself peacefully. Cotton factory officials imposed fines for breakage, misconduct, playing, and throwing items.³³ That management thought it necessary to impose fines for such activities suggests that workers had broken machinery, and enjoyed some sort of workplace revelry that was disruptive. Yet the extent to which those fines were imposed is questionable. A young carder reported that she was late for work every day and had never been fined.³⁴ In so doing she directly and successfully challenged the rule structure of the factory. It seems women might also have controlled their work speed to some extent. A factory official reported his

30 Herbert Gutman, Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America [New York, 1977], pp. 57 - 58.

31 Acadian Recorder, 2 May, 1887, p. 3.

32 Acadian Recorder, 20 July, 1888, p. 3.

33 RCRCL [1889], pp. 74, 77, and 80.

34 RCRCL [1889], p. 207.

hands turned out work more quickly when paid by the piece, rather than when they were paid wages. Presumably, guaranteed a set wage, women decreased their momentum.³⁵ Every summer, workers at the cotton factory and at Doull and Miller turned from their work to summer picnics. Though the firms provided workers with one company picnic, employees held their own picnics and attended at least a dozen picnics of other firms.³⁶ Women were also known to "fake a faint" to be allowed part of a day off.³⁷ Outworkers used their family members to aid them in their piecework.³⁸ And, occasionally, women would disobey a direct order. When the spinning department of the cotton factory was asked to work late one evening, they refused.³⁹

The population of the factory workspace suggests women provided themselves with a subtle but very effective means of shaping their experience in modern industry. Tamara Hareven suggests "... it is necessary to look not only at the ways in which industrial work affected family organization and work roles but also at the way the family affected conditions in

35 RCRCL [1889], p. 81.

36 RCRCL [1889], p. 7, 21, and 23.

37 Oral History Interview Elizabeth M.

38 RCRCL [1889], p. 7.

39 RCRCL [1889], p. 204.

the factory... ."40 As Elizabeth's sisters had helped to secure her employment at Moir's, so did this pattern transfer to other industries.41 It was especially true in the Nova Scotia Cotton Manufacturing Company where, following an industry tradition, family members clustered and worked together.42 Most cotton families in Halifax provided the majority of their workers to the cotton factory. Over 40 percent of the cotton women were employed at the same task and thus in the same room as at least one of their family members.43

Slightly over one-half of all female industrial workers were the sole family worker in their industry and another 13.5 percent belonged to the ranks of the lodgers. The

40 Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time (1982), p. 4.

41 Dublin, Women at Work (1979), pp. 35 - 38 and 43 - 44. Tamara Hareven found family and ethnic ties were the "undisputed" factors in hiring at the Amoskeag mill; see Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time (1982), p. 43. Reddy found "significant numbers" of family members among the linen weavers of Belle Epoque; see William Reddy, "Family and Factory: French Linen Weavers in Belle Epoque," Journal of Social History, Vol. 8, No. 2 [Winter, 1974-1975], p.104. Walkowitz notes that in the Harmony Mill of Cohoes, entire family units were hired for the factory; see Walkowitz, Worker, City, Company Town (1978), p. 61.

42 For a discussion of this tradition see: Bradbury, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City" [1979], p. 80 - 84; Herbert Lahne, The Cotton Mill Worker [Toronto, 1944]; Prude, The Coming of Industrial Order [1983]; Reddy, "Family and Factory" [1974 -1975]; Walkowitz, Worker, City, Company Town [1978]; and Wallace, Rockdale [1972].

43 Based on data collected from the nominal Census [1891].

TABLE SIX:
TASK SHARING OF FEMALE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, HALIFAX, 1891

CATEGORY	ALL WORKERS	DRESSMAKERS	TAILORESSES	COTTON
SOLE	54.8	59.2	53.7	42.8
SHARED	29.1	26.3	31.5	29.6
SPLIT	2.3	0.9	1.6	12.2
SEPERATE	0.3	0.7	0	1.0
LODGERS	13.5	13.9	13.2	14.3

Source: Nominal Census [1889]

Note: SOLE - the female industrial worker was the only person
in her family who worked in her industry
SHARED - all of the female industrial worker's family
members who worked in her industry shared the
same task
SPLIT - some of the female industrial worker's family who
worked in her industry shared the same task
SEPERATE - other family members worked in the female
industrial worker's but they did not perform
the same tasks

remaining 31.7 percent of women shared their industry with another family member. Twenty-nine percent of all industrial women shared the exact same task with all their family members in their industry and an additional 2.3 percent of all the workers shared the same task with some of their family members who worked in the same industry. Clearly, in cases where more than one family member worked in a given industry, she shared her workspace with that relative. This seems to suggest that in some instances women had some ability to influence the hiring practises of the factory.

The potentially troublesome enculturation into factory life was no doubt eased by an older sister in the factory. Not only would she assist in skill training, but also could she share with the novice worker the informal rules of life on the shop floor.⁴⁴ The teaching of factory lingo, appropriate behaviour (as defined by the workers), who to talk to and who to avoid, and the transmission of gossip eased the new worker's move to factory life.⁴⁵ While the industrial women of Halifax may not have been active union women, nor were they radical in their assertions of power, they were nonetheless capable of shaping their world of work and their place within it.

44 On this point see, Dublin, Women at Work [1979], p. 60.

45 See Dublin, Women at Work [[1979], pp. 47 - 49 and Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time [1982].

It is not surprising that the experience of active, formal protest belonged to the Christie Fish Company women. Bound by their common and distant homeland, their shared work tasks, and the intimate nature of the boardinghouse, these women lived an experience conducive to the creation of a shared, woman-identified, working-class culture. Their activism arose because they shared not only a deplorable worklife, but also an identifiably shared private life. The very uniqueness of their circumstances gave rise to their unique actions.

Neither is it especially surprising that the industrial women of Halifax did not embrace radical activism. The threat of blacklisting must have intimidated most women. The exit of young women from the workforce upon marriage drained potential leaders from the ranks of working women. Moreover, the division of women in the larger factories and industries and in-home work thwarted formal organization and undermined the creation of a collective consciousness or a shared working women's culture. The transitory, mobile nature of the workforce - which women helped to create - exacerbated the sense of individualism and personal autonomy. Neither did Victorian Halifax society encourage a sense of collectivity among industrial working women. Those who were concerned with reform wished to see women firmly ensconced in the home. Their out-of-home work was tolerated in hopes that the young industrial women would eventually marry and turn to full-

time, at-home work. Activism which promised better working conditions, and thus perhaps a longer period of time in the workforce, certainly was not encouraged by the reformers. Indeed, the exit of women from the wage-labour force upon marriage suggests that the values prescribed by the reformers were accepted by the majority of young working women. The acceptance of marriage and occupancy of the private sphere further undercut the creation of women's class identity. Women's loyalty and image was ensconced in the family, not within a sisterhood of workers. Formal activism on the part of industrial women was discouraged by both the structure of the workforce and the Victorian notions of women's societal role. Amidst those discouraging structures and norms grew women's sense of individual self-preservation.

The inert and subtle ways in which women created their own world of work remain, to a great extent, buried in their inarticulate pasts. Nonetheless some evidence shows that the industrial women of Halifax acted informally to create better working circumstances for themselves. Most often their assertions of power were individualistic, especially in the instances of job-leaving. At other times they acted more collectively, as in holding picnics. While women did not parade through the streets, nor did their actions shut down factories, they nonetheless attempted to create their own world of work within patriarchal and capitalist structures which would deny them any shred of autonomy, individual or

collective.

CONCLUSION

As the twentieth century dawned and settled over Halifax, industrial work became a rite of passage for many daughters of the city's working class. Marking the period of time between childhood and marriage, a significant proportion of young women engaged themselves in factory work and at-home work for local industries. They clustered in the sweated garment trades - with their clear ties to women's 'traditional,' pre-industrial work - and in the cotton factory, an institutional paradigm of womens' experiences under modern, industrial capitalism. But their concentrated groupings did not signify unity and solidarity. The structure of the workplaces and the edicts of late Victorian society combined to discourage women from attempting to make themselves a greater unity.

The female industrial workers of Halifax were a fundamentally isolated and fragmented lot. Divided by industry, factory, floor, room, task, and rules of the workplace which inspired disassociation, these women were, therefore, structurally alienated from one another. The high turnover rate of the young women and their short period of time in the workforce left little opportunity for individual women to emerge as leaders and few occasions to develop bonds and cohesive group identities. The importance of their contribution to the family wage economy or to their own subsistence only heightened the women's fears that radical

assertions of autonomy would be met with firing and blacklisting.

But their internal gender isolation and fragmentation also extended to their relationships, or lack thereof, with the men in their workplaces. Women's work, perceived and thus cast as different from men's, often physically separated male workers from female workers, leaving little opportunity for male traditions of unionism and active agency to transfer to women. Further, the subtle suggestions of male nervousness and unease surrounding the participation of women in the male world of out-of-home work served only to alienate men from their toiling sisters. They would not champion the advancement of their potential competitors. Even more importantly, for a man to advance the status of female co-workers was to advance the status of one's daughter, or wife. And to do that, was to test the soundness of patriarchal hegemony.

The radical agency of Halifax's industrial women was also undercut by a multitude of forces which reaffirmed for these young women their roles as potential wives and mothers. Marriage and motherhood was the accepted lifepath for young industrial women, a path from which few women voluntarily veered. The sheer economic grind of low wages meant independent living was not an option for most women. Women's wages were not calculated to encourage independence, rather, their earnings were seen as supplemental contributions to the

family wage economy. The economic security of women was far greater in a supported domestic environment than as an independent woman in the labourforce. While economics help to explain why women continued to choose marriage and reject independence, it does not explain why women left the labourforce upon marriage. In theory, women could contribute to the new family income after marriage, certainly until motherhood touched their lives.

While structural forces influenced the way women shaped their lives, so too did cultural forces. Women's experiences in the work environment reinforced once more the domestic role for women. The young industrial worker was surrounded by other single women who were working until their marriages. Constantly the young worker saw her work-mates leave the factory upon marriage to labour in their new households. Clearly the women reaffirmed for one another their role in the domestic sphere.

The edicts of late Victorian society confirmed, indeed prescribed, women's domestic role. Faced with the opportunity to shape a radical new role for women and offered the opportunity to fashion a healthier world of work for industrial women, social reformers, caught in the spirit of Victorian conservatism, advocated the maintenance of women's influence and participation within the domestic sphere. The very culture of Victorian society set young industrial women on a path to domesticity upon marriage.

It is not surprising, then, to find Halifax's industrial women seemingly complacent. As much as women's factory life was perceived as a stage of transition by the reformers, so too did these many factors combine to make the industrial women perceive their wagework as a passageway to adulthood. The women who were engaged in industry saw themselves merely as temporary workers, assisting the family economy until marriage or, in the case of married women, until the family's economic crisis was resolved. The world of work outside the home was something women saw as temporary and escapable. To amass and struggle for change was, perhaps, to offer more primacy to the wage work world than most women - and society at large - afforded it in their lives over the long term. Both structural and cultural forces, therefore, combined to thwart women's active agency, discouraging women's inclination to make themselves a greater unity. In the end, the potentially liberating experience of public sphere participation was an essentially conservative one, marked by women's continued focus and dependence upon the family for their identity and economic security. But industrial women did strive to influence their world, and make their worklives more liveable, in subtle ways. Denied a unified agent of change, women resorted to individual assertions of autonomy and personal expressions of struggle. As subtle and as carefully masked as those actions were, they nonetheless provided women with very real means of recasting their

lifescrpts.

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